

DC Wrap: Evers examining new dates for 7th CD special election

Posted on Thursday, Oct 3, 2019

Welcome to our weekly DC Wrap, where we write about Wisconsin's congressional delegation. Sign up [here](#) to receive the newsletter directly.

Quotes of the week

"They're trying to spin, but all they do is look dizzy."

-U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, during a Wisconsin Public TV appearance discussing Republicans' response to the impeachment inquiry initiated by House Dems.

"In America, the big get bigger and the small go out."

- U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue after warning it will be "very difficult" for family dairy farms to stay in business unless they scale up in size.



This week's news

— Gov. Tony Evers' office is looking at options to reschedule the planned special election in the 7th CD after discovering a conflict between state and federal law.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

The conflict rules out the current dates or holding it concurrently with the regularly scheduled spring elections.

Evers last week called the special election for Jan. 27, a Monday. Under state law, that requires a primary, if needed, to be 28 days earlier, and it would be Dec. 30 under Evers' call.

But the U.S. Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act requires absentee ballots to be sent to voters at least 45 days before federal elections.

There are 49 days between the February primary and April general election. But that would not be enough time to certify the results of the February primary, create ballots and send them overseas by the 45-day deadline, according to the gov's office.

A spokeswoman for Evers said the gov's office was looking at the possibility of aligning either the 7th CD primary or general election with one of the spring elections already scheduled to minimize the impact on local officials. The gov's office is working with the state and U.S. Justice departments on finalizing a date as soon as possible.

The scramble to find a new date comes after Republicans complained last week that Evers selected the rare — if not unprecedented — Monday dates for the special election to avoid having the general election on the April 7 ballot.

The state's presidential primaries will also be that day, along with the state Supreme Court race as conservative Justice Daniel Kelly seeks a full 10-year term. Progressives are hoping the presidential primary helps drive turnout among Dems, which would improve their chances of beating Kelly. President Trump won the 7th CD by more than 20 points in 2016 and having the special election on the April ballot could turnout more Republicans than would've voted that day otherwise.

Under state law, Evers had a narrow window in January to call the special election without triggering a statute that requires special elections after Feb. 1 to coincide with the regularly scheduled elections.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, last week urged Evers to reschedule the election, because the planned Dec. 30 primary falls on the last day of Hanukkah. And state GOP Executive Director Mark Jefferson knocked the gov for the scramble

to find a new date.

“Gov. Evers set an election date in order to disenfranchise rural voters, military voters and those who celebrate Hanukkah,” Jefferson said. “He thought he could ignore federal law, but he got caught and now has to change the election date.”

The gov’s office said it was following guidance from the state Elections Commission on requirements under Wisconsin law as it picked the original date for the special election.

— Two GOP candidates for the 7th CD piled on the criticism over Evers’ scheduling snafus.

“Governor Evers’ political motivations have resulted in chaos and uncertainty for voters in Northern Wisconsin,” said GOP candidate Jason Church, an aide to U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson. “I look forward to continuing a conversation with the people of the 7th Congressional District and earning their support.”

Meanwhile, fellow GOP candidate Tom Tiffany, a state senator from Hazelhurst, tweeted, “It is imperative that all military and overseas voters have the opportunity to cast their ballots. The election dates are in Governor Evers hands. I am prepared to earn the voters trust regardless of the election date.”

So far, Church, Tiffany and Michael Opela, who describes himself on his Facebook page as a business owner and entrepreneur, have indicated plans to run on the Republican side. No Dems have formally entered the race.

Under Evers’ original executive order, nomination papers in the race could begin circulating Sept. 23.

— U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue today warned it will be “very difficult” for family dairy farms to stay in business unless they scale up in size.

Speaking after a town hall event with dairy stakeholders at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, President Trump’s ag secretary told reporters he doesn’t think small

businesses should “have a guaranteed income or guaranteed profitability.”

“In America, the big get bigger and the small go out,” Perdue said.

Those comments vexed dairy farmer Jerry Volenec, who spoke with reporters in a news conference organized by the state Dem Party shortly after Perdue’s appearance.

“What I heard today from the secretary of agriculture is there’s no place for me,” said Volenec, who has 330 cows at his Grant County farm. “I feel like we’re a benefit to society.”

According to data from the state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Wisconsin has lost 551 dairy farms so far this year — a rate of roughly two per day. That figure puts the state on pace to surpass the 638 dairy operations lost in 2018 and already tops the 465 lost in 2017.

Farmers at the town hall attributed the decline to: low milk prices; a transition away from the traditional family farmer model towards operations that “flood the market” with product; and Trump’s trade policies that have sparked retaliatory tariffs on dairy from Mexico and China. Perdue labeled the Chinese as “cheaters” in international trade.

Perdue said he believes the 2018 farm bill enacted by Congress will “stem the flow” of those losses but forecasted it will still be difficult for smaller operations to compete with larger factory farms.

“It’s very difficult on an economy of scale with the capital needs and all the environmental regulations and everything else today to survive milking 40, 50, or 60 or even 100 cows,” he said.

He noted that while the number of farmers was shrinking, “the dairy cows haven’t reduced that much.”

“The dairy cows haven’t gone to slaughter,” he said. “They’ve gone to someone else’s herd for the most part.”

But Darin Von Ruden, president of Wisconsin Farmers Union who runs a 50-cow operation in Westby, warned that consolidation was “not a good way to go.”

“I mean, do we want one company owning all our food in this country?” he asked at the DPW news conference.

See the DATCP statistics:

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Wisconsin/Publications/Dairy/Historical_Data_Series/brt2004.pdf

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson said “there’s nothing wrong” with a phone call between President Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that Dems charge is grounds for impeachment.

But a spokeswoman for the state Dem Party slammed Johnson for those comments, saying “he would rather roll over and spit out Trump’s talking points than defend the constitution he swore to protect.”

“That Ron Johnson has chosen to provide cover for a president who’s abused the power of his office and betrayed our national security interests shows just how much of a spineless partisan Johnson has become since moving to DC,” spokeswoman Courtney Beyer said.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi last week said the House would begin an impeachment inquiry shortly before the release of a memo detailing a conversation between Trump and Zelensky that Dems alleged showed the president pressured the newly elected leader of Ukraine to investigate rival presidential candidate Joe Biden and his family.

But Johnson, R-Oshkosh, said in an interview with WTMJ-AM’s Steve Scaffidi on Sept. 30 that “I understand where he was coming from” with the inquiry about Biden.

“He was listing a host of issues,” Johnson said. “He was concerned about Ukrainian corruption, and there’s all kinds of questions that are not answered.”

After reviewing a memo detailing aspect of the conversation, Johnson said he believed the call was “pretty gracious” and knocked Dems and “some members of the media” for “putting the worst possible construction on that phone call.”

“I’ve spoken to the president enough on the phone and in person, it’s how he approached his job,” he said. “He’s a New York business guy. He’s different than a

Wisconsinite.”

Johnson also addressed a story published by the New York Times that reported the Intelligence Community whistleblower alleged administration officials were told to “lock down” all records of the phone call between Trump and Zelensky on an isolated computer system.

While a memo recounting details of Trump’s call was released by the White House, Johnson highlighted past conversations with heads of state from Australia and Mexico that were leaked to the press. He said those actions were “incredibly damaging” to Trump’s “ability to conduct foreign policy.”

“So it’s just kind of natural that the White House takes that seriously and make sure that those conversations, transcripts of those things are held in pretty high security,” he said. “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

The Oshkosh Republican added Russian President Vladimir Putin had expressed hope his conversation with Trump would not be leaked and said foreign policy required “heads of state talking candidly.”

“There’s a reason why this stuff has remained confidential and not open for the scrutiny of the public,” he said.

Quizzed by Scaffidi as to whether the impeachment inquiry would hurt Trump’s chances in the 2020 presidential election, Johnson conceded “it’s hard to say” and pivoted to expressed sympathy for what the president has faced “from his tormentors.”

“We do need to be very concerned if there are individuals in government trying to undermine the duly elected president of the United States,” he said. “I think there’s certainly evidence that that’s what is occurring.”

The appearance came after Johnson and U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, on Sept. 27 sent a letter to U.S. AG Bill Barr requesting the DOJ probe ties between Ukraine and Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign.

Johnson and Grassley said in the letter they have “concerns about foreign assistance in the 2016 election that have not been thoroughly addressed.”

See the letter:

<https://www.grassley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09-27%20CEG%20RHJ%20to%20DOJ%20%28Ukraine%20DNC%29.pdf>

— The addition of 20 F-35 fighter jets to Madison's Truax Field continues to be a thorn in U.S. U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan's side.

The Town of Vermont Dem faced a number of questions about the jets at a town hall meeting in Sun Prairie Wednesday night as local residents raised concerns over the noise the new jets make.

"I don't have the answers to the questions you guys have," Pocan said to the crowd. "I want more information before I sign off on this, and you all deserve to have that information too."

Pocan stopped short of saying he'd oppose the F-35s when he was pushed on it, and instead urged the residents to take advantage of the recently extended comment period. He insisted military officials didn't care what one member of Congress had to say, but would listen to hundreds of unhappy people.

The new F-35 jets would be a huge boost for Wisconsin's economy, projecting to generate slightly under \$2 million a year in local activity, due partly because of the work it would add for the 115th Regiment of the National Guard. Pocan voiced his concern over losing out on that economic impact, and the jobs it would create.

"We want to be able to keep the 115th without adversely affecting residents' lives, with the F-16s moving out we have to find something for them to do," he said.

He added that the only way he would support the F-35s coming to Madison was if we had more information about the noise impact, and homeowners would be properly compensated if they were forced to move.

"Your house is the most important investment you'll ever make, and we can't take that away from people," he said.

When asked about President Trump's phone call with the president of Ukraine, Pocan said that Republicans are secretly concerned about Trump's actions.

"Behind closed doors they're worried about what they're seeing out of the

president, but very few of them have stood up and said anything yet,” he said.

Pocan added that after the impeachment process starts, he expects more Republicans to come out against the president.

— U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Green Bay, released a joint statement with U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., slamming the Chinese government on the 70th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China.

The statement from the two Republicans revisited the history of the Chinese Communist Party and denounced its treatment of the Chinese people.

“Since its founding, the People’s Republic of China has deprived its citizens of their fundamental human rights and human dignity,” the pair said in their statement.

On the day of the anniversary, the CCP held a parade in Beijing’s city center, where the military performed a variety of celebratory demonstrations.

“This is not a day for celebration. Rather, it is an opportunity to remember the victims, past and present, of the Chinese Communist Party,” the statement read.

See the release:

<https://gallagher.house.gov/media/press-releases/rebs-gallagher-and-cheney-70th-anniversary-people-s-republic-china>

— U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin introduced bipartisan legislation to expand educational opportunities regarding healthcare for veterans.

Baldwin was joined by U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., in proposing a bill that would provide pre-health undergraduate students with increased exposure to veteran-specific health care procedures.

“Students interested in a medical career need better access to training opportunities, and our VA medical centers need to attract a workforce with more exposure to the VA system at an earlier stage in their education in order to better understand veterans’ specific health needs,” the Madison said in the release.

The legislation would implement a one-year pilot program at the VA medical centers to give students observation opportunities.

“We have a shared responsibility to do right by our veterans and that includes making sure our doctors and nurses are trained and well-equipped to deliver the highest quality care to those who have served,” Baldwin said in the release.

See the release:

<https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/press-releases/baldwin-tillis-legislation-to-improve-the-quality-of-health-care-for-veterans>

— The Wisconsin Alumni Association’s DC Chapter is set to host a political dialogue for UW-Madison alumni on the 2020 elections.

The event, which is part of the DC Badgers’ Lifelong Learner Series, will feature former UW-Madison chancellor and U.S. Rep. Donna Shalala, D-Fla., and UW-Madison alumni U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio. The dialogue will be moderated by UW-Madison alum Wendy Riemann of 1492 Communications, a government and strategic communications organization.

DC Badgers are hosting the event as part of UW-Madison’s Lifelong Learning 2020 initiative. The campus-wide strategic plan, which started in 2014, aims to create a more meaningful experience for alumni and generate more revenue for the university.

See the Lifelong Learner event page:

<https://www.uwalumni.com/event/dc-lifelong-learning-series/>

Posts of the week

Well, Saturday was the best day of my life. pic.twitter.com/waAZNJie1g

— Rep. Gallagher Press Office (@RepGallagher) [September 30, 2019](#)

<https://twitter.com/Duffy4Wisconsin/status/1178847171828944896>

Happy Birthday, Mr. President! [#Happy95thJimmy](#)
<https://t.co/sTaU7xgM6u>

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [October 1, 2019](#)

Stopped at Ricardo's in Greendale for some pizza after our Financial Aid Information Session at Greendale High School. ☐☐☐
<pic.twitter.com/zjiTBpjN5g>

— Bryan Steil (@RepBryanSteil) [October 3, 2019](#)

ICYMI

[Wisconsin lawmaker hits the target with claim on racial background of death row prisoners](#)

[U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson fields questions in Pewaukee. And not a word about impeachment.](#)

[Matt Walker, the son of former Gov. Scott Walker, won't run for Congress after all](#)
[Sen. Johnson wants answers on reported changes to whistleblower requirements](#)
[Rep. Moore: Impeachment vote could come by Thanksgiving](#)

[Sean Duffy: Baby No. 9 arrived Monday night, will need open heart surgery](#)

[U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin Urges Trump Administration to Withdraw Proposal to Take Away Food Assistance from Millions of Americans](#)