

# DC Wrap: Johnson hints at “own little piece of the puzzle” on Ukraine

Posted on Thursday, Oct 31, 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

“I realize—I don't mean to be partisan—I realize the universities are important constituencies for the Democrats, but right now, they have, too often, oversold the value of their product.”

- U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothmann discussing the cost of higher education.

“As a struggling, poor woman on welfare, I have personally experienced the extraordinary efforts that are made to prevent poor women from getting educational opportunity.”

- U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore promoting Health Profession Opportunity Grants for low-income women to become doulas and midwives.



## This week's news

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson continues his vocal defense of President Trump in the face of a House impeachment inquiry and said he had his “own little piece of the puzzle” on Ukraine that he planned to share.

>> 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.](#)

Quizzed Wednesday by WTMJ-AM's Steve Scaffidi on the impeachment inquiry, Johnson said he viewed the probe as a "continuation" of "a concerted effort... since the day after the election to sabotage this administration" and pivoted to a DOJ investigation into the origins of Robert Mueller's probe exploring Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

"This is, from my standpoint, just a continuation of the left, of Democrats, of the press wanting to take down this president," the Oshkosh Republican said.

Johnson dismissed the notion that he was personally getting sucked into the probe after he was identified in testimony given by several witnesses as being present for key events in the leadup to a phone call between Trump and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky that kicked off the impeachment inquiry. But he conceded that as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, he has "been a part of it."

The Oshkosh Republican has offered a full-throated defense of Trump on a number of occasions since reports of the call with Zelensky came to light over a month ago and continued to defend the president today. But he labeled criticism of a White House official who yesterday testified before congressional investigators as "inappropriate."

Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, a Ukrainian-born U.S. Army veteran who earned a Purple Heart fighting in Iraq and now serves as a Ukraine expert on the National Security Council, told impeachment investigators in his opening statement that Trump undermined national security by asking the newly elected president of Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden and his family.

That opening statement, which was obtained and released by a number of media outlets on Monday evening, drew the wrath of a number of conservative commentators, including former U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy, R-Weston.

In an appearance on CNN before Vindman's testimony before congressional investigators, Duffy said the White House official seemed "incredibly concerned about Ukrainian defense."

"I don't know that he's concerned about American policy," he continued, adding

Vindman “has an affinity, I think, for the Ukraine,” is from there and speaks the language.

But Johnson added his voice to a chorus from Republican lawmakers knocking criticism of Vindman.

“Anybody that dons a uniform, puts themselves into harm’s way, particularly then somebody who’s suffered a battlefield injury, I mean, that’s my definition of a patriot,” he said.

Duffy sent a follow-up tweet yesterday, “Lt. Col. Vindman is an American war hero. As I said clearly this morning on air ‘I salute Mr. Vindman’s service.’ My point is that Mr. Vindman is an unelected advisor, he gives ADVICE. President Trump sets the policy.”

See Vidman’s opening statement:

<https://static.politico.com/69/13/cdff8a4420a8a4d8a65439570f2/vindman-statement-final.pdf>

**— U.S. Rep. Ron Kind, who said earlier this month that impeaching the president should be a “last resort,” told reporters in Washington, D.C., that he plans to back a proposal to formalize the House inquiry.**

The La Crosse Dem’s office didn’t provide any comment beyond tweets from DC-based reporters.

But he told the Washington Post Tuesday that “we fully support a thorough investigation and we’re going to continue doing what we’re doing.”

Kind, who represents a district that President Trump won by 5 points in 2016, is the last of Wisconsin’s three House Dems to back impeachment proceedings.

Regional RNC spokeswoman Mandi Merritt tweeted in response to the news, “And he’ll pay the price at the ballot box in 2020 for it.” Her tweet included links to local coverage of anti-impeachment protests Republicans put on outside Kind’s La Crosse office earlier this month.

So far, the only Republican who has registered with the Elections Commission to run

against Kind is Kevin Ruscher, of River Falls.

Meanwhile, Justin Bonner, an Eau Claire software engineer, has announced plans to challenge Kind in the Dem primary on a platform that includes supporting the Green New Deal, Medicare for all, tuition-free public college and ranked choice voting. He has not yet registered with the state Elections Commission.

See Merritt's tweet:

[https://twitter.com/mandi\\_merritt/status/1189251532488880131](https://twitter.com/mandi_merritt/status/1189251532488880131)

**— U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher joined House colleagues in introducing legislation to prevent federal trust funds from going broke, saying “there’s no time to waste.”**

This bipartisan bill would assign lawmakers to “rescue committees” tasked with drafting legislation to restore solvency to programs like Medicare and Social Security.

Joining the Green Bay Republican on the bill are Reps. Ed Case, D-Hawaii, William Timmons, R-S.C., and Ben McAdams, D-Utah.

“Problems don’t age well, and the TRUST Act would ensure that elected officials have the opportunity to work together and find solutions to this mess. It’s high time we have these tough debates in Congress, and I hope my colleagues take up this bipartisan, bicameral idea immediately,” Gallagher said in a release.

Companion legislation was introduced in the Senate by Sens. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., Todd Young, R-Ind., Doug Jones, D-Ala., and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz.

“We must put in place a responsible process now to prevent dramatic cuts to programs like Social Security and Medicare or be forced to enact massive tax hikes down the road, both of which would be devastating to middle-class Americans,” Romney said.

See the release:

<https://gallagher.house.gov/media/press-releases/gallagher-colleagues-introduce-bipartisan-bicameral-plan-rescue-troubled>

**— U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin focused on healthcare-related legislation this week, reintroducing a proposal aimed at reducing healthcare costs for young adults.**

The bill, which would increase the value of premium tax credits for young adults ages 18 to 35 years old, aims to lower insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs for individuals who are uninsured.

“Making health care more affordable for younger adults with targeted tax credits can help ensure that they sign up for quality coverage, which will help strengthen the Marketplace and help lower costs for all,” Baldwin said in a release.

In addition, the bill would maintain coverage for pre-existing conditions and allow continued Affordable Care Act provisions.

“More Americans are uninsured today than when President Trump took office and his administration continues to make it harder for people to get the quality, affordable health care coverage they need. My legislation will help reduce health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs for young adults and make it easier for them to get quality, affordable health care coverage,” Baldwin said.

See the release: <https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/press-releases/aye-act-2019>

**— Taking on a new role in the House, U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil was appointed to the Financial Services Subcommittee on Investor Protection, Entrepreneurship, and Capital Markets.**

On this subcommittee, the Janesville Republican will work on initiatives to protect investors and promote capital market activities. He’ll also oversee certain federal agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission.

“Federal regulations need to be more efficient. As financial services adapt to the 21st century, we must proactively support small businesses and strengthen capital markets so all Americans can succeed,” Steil said in a release.

In addition to his new role, Steil also serves on the Subcommittees on Housing,

Community Development, and Insurance and Diversity and Inclusion, as well as the Task Force on Financial Technology.

“Vibrant capital markets are critical to the success of workers and entrepreneurs in Southeast Wisconsin. On the Capital Markets Subcommittee, I will work to address issues impacting Main Street investors and job creators,” Steil said.

See the release:

<https://steil.house.gov/media/press-releases/steil-serve-house-financial-services-subcommittee-investor-protection>

**— U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan is calling on U.S. Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett to perform flight demonstrations at the Truax Air National Guard Base outside of Madison.**

This came after the Air Force released a draft Environmental Impact Statement detailing the possible noise impact of the F-35 and F-16 missions on the surrounding neighborhoods.

“Without commitments for noise mitigation assistance from the Air Force, it will be difficult to support any potential F-35 mission at Truax Air National Guard Base. I believe this must be addressed to ensure any negative outcomes caused by the F-35 coming to Madison are adequately addressed,” Pocan said in the statement.

See Pocan’s statement:

<https://pocan.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/pocan-submits-public-comment-on-f-35-mission-at-truax-air-national-guard>

## ***Posts of the week***

Dreams really do come true. [#PullUpBar pic.twitter.com/E9gkR4RLcC](https://twitter.com/E9gkR4RLcC)

— Rep. Gallagher Press Office (@RepGallagher) [October 25, 2019](#)

In honor of [#NationalArtDay](#), here's Emma, the winner of this year's Congressional Art Competition from [#WI06](#) and her work "Beauty", which currently hangs in the U.S. Capitol. [pic.twitter.com/lyKpcFSpp3](https://pic.twitter.com/lyKpcFSpp3)

— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [October 25, 2019](#)

Always happy to exchange notes with an activist. [#TheGoodPlace](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/AHBYllmwCx](https://pic.twitter.com/AHBYllmwCx)

— Rep. Gwen Moore (@RepGwenMoore) [October 30, 2019](#)

Snow fell in Southeast Wisconsin this morning! Here is a picture from Main Street in Janesville of our office. [pic.twitter.com/kruTo1mRhi](https://pic.twitter.com/kruTo1mRhi)

— Bryan Steil (@RepBryanSteil) [October 29, 2019](#)

So [@TedDanson](#), is Congress the Good Place or...?  
[pic.twitter.com/qmMq3yj2j](https://pic.twitter.com/qmMq3yj2j)

— Rep. Mark Pocan (@RepMarkPocan) [October 29, 2019](#)

## **ICYMI**

[\*\*Sen. Ron Johnson's meeting underscores his involvement in Ukrainian saga\*\*](#)

[\*\*Rep. Ron Kind: al-Baghdadi's death is proof troops should stay in Syria\*\*](#)

[\*\*Rep. Gallagher slams Congress as budget battle continues\*\*](#)  
[\*\*CNN defends new contributor Sean Duffy while anchors decry his 'anti-immigrant bigotry'\*\*](#)  
[\*\*Barrett, Moore to Lead Growing DNC Team\*\*](#)  
[\*\*Pence pushes trade deal in Wisconsin\*\*](#)