

DC Wrap: U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner announces retirement

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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

"When I began my public service in 1968, I said I would know when it was time to step back. After careful consideration, I have determined at the completion of this term, my 21st term in Congress, it will be that time."

- U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner announcing he won't seek re-election.

"We took a good step, but it's a baby step, in signing a letter support for Operation Safe Return where we rapidly and more accurately determine those families that clearly don't have even a credible fear claim and safely - and I underline safely - return those individuals back to the safe zones of Central America."

- U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson said when asked about a bipartisan solution to the humanitarian crisis at the southern border on CNN's "State of the Union." Watch [the full interview here](#).



This week's news

— Potential candidates for the 5th CD are weighing their options following U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner's surprising announcement that he won't seek re-election next fall after four decades in Congress.

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Waukesha Co. Exec Paul Farrow called Sensenbrenner's retirement a "blow to the party" coming so soon after fellow GOP U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy, of Weston, said he will resign Sept. 23. Farrow, a former Republican state senator, also said he will consider a bid in 2020 for the 5th CD.

"Am I going to think about it? Yeah, I'll sit down and talk to my family and friends and see if that's the pathway for me. Who knows?" Farrow said.

Dem Tom Palzewicz, who lost to Sensenbrenner with 38 percent of the vote in 2018, quickly announced plans to run for the office again.

Meanwhile, state Sen. Chris Kapenga, R-Delafield, told WisPolitics.com in a text he'll consider a bid, and Kevin Nicholson, who ran unsuccessfully for the GOP's U.S. Senate nomination last year, tweeted "There will be time to make a decision about this race later" as he praised Sensenbrenner.

Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, long considered a possible candidate for the seat when Sensenbrenner left Congress, said in a statement that voters in the 5th CD had benefited from a "strong conservative voice for years, and now more than ever they deserve another strong conservative voice fighting on their behalf in Washington." But Fitzgerald gave no indication if he will consider a bid.

A GOP source said Ben Voekel, an aide to U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, would consider a bid.

And a source close to former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch said she and her supporters are focused on a potential run for gov in 2022.

— Sensenbrenner, who is in line next year to become the longest-serving House member in Wisconsin history, noted in his announcement his lengthy career.

Sensenbrenner, who was elected to the House in 1978, said that includes doing

more than 100 town hall meetings each year while in Congress, taking 23,882 votes on the House floor and seeing 217 bills he sponsored signed into law by six different presidents.

“I think I am leaving this district, our Republican Party, and most important, our country, in a better place than when I began my service,” Sensenbrenner said.

Former House Speaker Paul Ryan, who decided against seeking re-election last year, praised Sensenbrenner as a mentor.

A former House Judiciary chair, Sensenbrenner helped lead passage of the Patriot Act following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and was a longtime supporter of the Voting Rights Act. He also was one of the House managers in the impeachment of former President Clinton.

“He has provided an amazing example for generations of Wisconsin Republican legislators to follow and showed us how to be effective advocates and representatives,” Ryan said.

See the Sensenbrenner release:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2019/sensenbrenner-campaign-will-retire-at-the-end-of-the-116th-congress/>

— Both of Wisconsin’s U.S. senators have net favorable ratings in the Marquette University Law School Poll, even though a decent chunk of the electorate don’t have an opinion of them.

Forty-four percent of registered voters had a favorable opinion of U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, while 40 percent had a negative one. Despite winning re-election by more than 10 percentage points less than a year ago, 16 percent said they had no opinion of her.

For U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, the split was 40-29. But despite being in statewide office for more than eight years, 31 percent didn’t have an opinion of him.

Poll director Charles Franklin said it was the natural effect of a six-year Senate term,

where voters lose track of senators in between elections.

Meanwhile, 55 percent of registered voters surveyed said the state is headed in the right direction, while 37 percent believe it's on the wrong track. That split in April, the last time the poll was in the field, was 52-40.

See the full results:

<https://law.marquette.edu/poll/>

See more on the head-to-head match ups in the presidential race:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2019/marquette-law-poll-finds-trump-job-approval-upside-down-biden-leading-president-dem-field/>

— U.S. Rep. Ron Kind said he's hopeful the House of Representatives will vote on the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement this fall.

But he said Wednesday that Dems are negotiating with President Trump's trade ambassador on "things that we'd like to see improved on in USMCA before it can be brought up for wide bipartisan support."

The La Crosse Dem said in a conference call with reporters that conversations with U.S. Trade Representative Bob Lighthizer have largely been constructive, but Kind highlighted the trade deal's enforceability chapter as its most "glaring" shortcoming.

"You could have the best trade agreement in the world on paper, but if it lacks enforceability, if it lacks followup, it's meaningless and the other countries will know it's meaningless and then you have nothing," he said.

Kind said the USMCA currently relies "almost singularly" upon the president's discretion to find Mexico or Canada in violation of the agreement "and then unilaterally impose tariffs against them."

"That will only put us back in the box that we are currently in with the unilateral action and invite Mexico and Canada to retaliate against us again," he said.

— U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan also highlighted problems with enforcement provisions surrounding labor and environmental regulations and added a provision that equated to “a big, wet, sloppy kiss to pharma” made the trade deal hard to support.

“You get rid of that, and you actually move the enforceability of labor and environmental, I predict you’d have 370-plus votes for a trade agreement,” he said.

The Town of Vermont Dem added Lighthizer and a congressional working group had developed “better language around labor and environmental” but noted those policies were outside of the framework of the trade agreement, “which makes it often not enforceable.”

“If that language you actually believe in is real, just move it into a place that’s enforceable and then we all agree,” Pocan said.

— Kind slammed Trump’s use of tariffs against both China and “all of our closest friends and allies throughout the globe.”

“I’ve never seen a president work harder to plunge our nation into a recession,” he said.

That comment drew a sharp rebuke from NRCC Regional Press Secretary Carly Atchison, who said the La Crosse Dem “would rather berate President Trump than help Wisconsin dairy farmers and pass the USMCA trade deal, which would bring immediate relief but is currently being stalled by Kind and the rest of the socialist Democrats in Congress.”

Still, Kind said that taking punitive action “outside of the international legal framework” had invited retaliation that has been “devastating” to farmers and families across the state.

“What’s disturbing about it is the lack of any type of vision or long-term strategy or plan or an exit ramp to all of this,” he said. “China’s got a very long-term vision on this: 20, 30, 40 years, sometimes a 200-year plan, whereas I’m afraid President Trump has a 2020 vision. Just whatever’s gonna set him up for the next election

cycle.”

Kind agreed that action needs to be taken against China, but he said Dems are calling for the country to build a “broad-based international coalition of like-minded countries that are also experiencing the same type of cheating” and to pursue grievances through the World Trade Organization. Collective action, he said, would “make it hard then for China to retaliate against us alone and hard for them to ignore WTO decisions.”

“I think that’s a missed opportunity,” Kind said. “There are reforms that the WTO needs, and the president should be pressing for them. But by working outside it gives China and these other countries a chance just to ignore what we’re requesting of them and to retaliate in a tit-for-tat situation with no end in sight.”

Pocan, meanwhile, said he didn’t think “there’s any single prescription” to address illegal Chinese business practices.

“I think there’s a lot of different ways you can deal with China, but not through this tariff war and I think that (Trump) has to start reeling back some of what he’s doing,” he said.

— President Trump will reappropriate roughly \$8 million dollars from a military construction project in Wisconsin to pay for a wall along the southern border.

Wisconsin National Guard Spokesman Capt. Joe Trovato told WisPolitics.com that funding for a small-arms range at the Wisconsin Air National Guard base at Truax Field in Madison would be diverted. Construction was scheduled to begin next year, but Trovato noted the base is operating without a small-arms range now and the decision to strip funding would not affect readiness.

Pocan said before a list of projects that would lose funding was released that he believed that a housing unit at Fort McCoy “could be having money stolen” to fund “the folly of a wall.”

Kind said he is doing his own follow-up with Fort McCoy and Volk Field Air National Guard Base.

“It is very disturbing, and I think it’s clearly unconstitutional money grab,” Kind said. “Congress appropriates the money. The president doesn’t get to then take it and spend it on anything that he wants.

“I’m sure this is going to get revisited again in the courts.”

— U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher concluded his inaugural van tour across Wisconsin’s 8th Congressional District.

The four-day tour included stops at businesses and organizations. Gallagher also visited The Community Blood Center in Appleton to generate awareness of the blood shortage in Northeast Wisconsin.

“The goal is to go back into session in September energized with a renewed sense of purpose. And to really have everyone’s focus be on Northeast Wisconsin,” Gallagher said in an appearance on WTAQ.

See Rep. Gallagher’s van vlog:

<https://twitter.com/RepGallagher/status/1166009767812374529?s=20>

— U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin announced nearly \$5.2 million in federal funding to help fight the opioid epidemic in Wisconsin.

Baldwin, who has championed opioid prevention efforts through her work on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said the \$5.2 million in federal dollars should provide necessary prevention and treatment resources to Wisconsinites.

The funding is being awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Overdose to Action, a three-year cooperative agreement that focuses on reducing the number of opioid overdoses.

“Washington needs to do more to address the opioid epidemic and a strong partnership with state and local officials is essential to an effective response. I’m confident that Governor Evers will act immediately to put these federal investments to work in Wisconsin to support our continued fight against this deadly crisis,” Baldwin said.

See the release:

<https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/press-releases/baldwin-announces-nearly-52-million-to-reduce-opioid-overdoses>

— U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy praised lawmakers in the Senate for introducing a bill to address foreign tariffs on U.S. goods.

This came after Duffy sponsored similar legislation in the House of Representatives earlier this year. The bill, which was introduced by Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., would give the President the power to take action against “unfair” tariffs.

“The need for reform has never been greater. That’s why I introduced the U.S. Reciprocal Trade Act to give the President better tools to address the unfair tariffs and international trade rules that hurt Wisconsin workers,” Duffy said in a release.

See the release:

<https://duffy.house.gov/press-release/congressman-sean-duffy-applauds-senator-lindsey-graham-and-senator-joe-manchin-for>

Posts of the week

From students to teachers to staff, hope everyone had a great first day [#backtoschool!](#) Study hard and have a great year! ➡
pic.twitter.com/uaKU3n0EN9

— Rep. Ron Kind (@RepRonKind) [September 3, 2019](#)

Milwaukee marks the birthplace of Wisconsin’s first unions in 1847. Today, I proudly stood with Wisconsin workers at Milwaukee’s Laborfest and will continue to do so. [#LaborDay2019](#) pic.twitter.com/jHdsAPT7QM

— Rep. Gwen Moore (@RepGwenMoore) [September 2, 2019](#)

Had a great time meeting with high schoolers from [@racinestcats](#).
Impressive students! [pic.twitter.com/irAvgHujF8](#)

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

Fun celebrating Labor Day at LaborFest! [@LaborSCFL](#)
[pic.twitter.com/L0bow6mnam](#)

— Mark Pocan (@MarkPocan) [September 2, 2019](#)

ICYMI

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[US Rep Mike Gallagher Addresses Health Care, Gun Laws](#)

[Congressman Mark Pocan says 'anything possible' in northern congressional district special election](#)

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