

DC Wrap: Wisconsin lawmakers knock Trump's troop withdrawal from Turkey-Syria border

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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 asked the president about that, he completely denied it. He adamantly denied it. He vehemently, angrily denied it. He said, 'I'd never do that.'"

- U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson during an appearance on NBC's 'Meet The Press', discussing President Trump's potential involvement with Ukraine

"They're tired of a President who thinks he's above the law, and they know that he put his own personal interests above our national security, and they're upset."

- U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, discussing constituent opinions about the Trump-Ukraine inquiry during an appearance on NBC News



This week's news

— The Wisconsin congressional delegation slammed President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from the Turkey-Syria border ahead of a Turkish invasion that has targeted an America ally fighting the Islamic State group.

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The White House announced late Sunday night that American forces would step aside to allow Turkey to move ahead with a “long-planned operation” in northern Syria. But the move exposed Kurdish combatants who have fought alongside the U.S. military in Syria against ISIS. Turkish President Erdogan has long viewed Kurds as a threat to the security of his country.

Erdogan official announced the offensive Wednesday and the Turkish Defense Ministry today said ground forces were advancing against Kurdish fighters with the support of air strikes and artillery.

U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, in the leadup to the invasion said the Kurds have been “steadfast allies in defeating ISIS” and said abandoning them could be “a tragic mistake.”

After Turkey launched the offensive, Johnson tagged the president in a tweet that indicated “our concerns are being realized.”

“In order to prevent an escalation that could further threaten our national security interests, the US should act to stabilize the situation.”

Sen. Tammy Baldwin slammed Trump for turning “his back on the Kurds”

“This will strengthen ISIS & weaken efforts to fight terrorism,” the Madison Dem said. “America should be working with our allies to create less conflict & tension in the Middle East, but the President is creating more problems in Syria and Iraq.”

U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Green Bay, also weighed in, saying the decision “undermines our credibility and national security interests.”

Trump in a Monday tweet warned that if Erdogan does “anything that I, in my great and unmatched wisdom, consider to be off limits, I will totally destroy and obliterate the Economy of Turkey.”

See the White House statement:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-85/>

See Baldwin's tweet:

<https://twitter.com/SenatorBaldwin/status/1181300004880814080>

See Gallagher's tweet:

<https://twitter.com/RepGallagher/status/1181305155653918726>

See Johnson's tweets:

<https://twitter.com/SenRonJohnson/status/1181322986227470336>

<https://twitter.com/SenRonJohnson/status/1182068277687787521>

See Trump's tweet:

<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1181232249821388801>

— Kaiser Family Foundation pollster Ashley Kirzinger said health care is “among the top issues” voters want to hear about heading into the 2020 election.

But she said that voters would make choices in both the presidential election and in down-ballot races “almost entirely on their perceptions of President Trump.”

Speaking at the WisPolitics.com Midwest Polling Summit in Madison on Wednesday, Kirzinger touted the importance of health care in the last five presidential elections, saying it's been a top-three issue for voters since 2000 and was the most important topic in the 2018 midterm elections.

But even as the polling showed concerns about health care becoming more prominent in voter's minds nationally, Kirzinger said the data reflected a sharp partisan divide.

“Seventy-five percent of Democratic voters say healthcare was the most important issue facing the country compared to 23 percent of the Republicans,” she said, citing a May 2018 KFF poll that found Republicans ranked immigration, economy and gun policy as higher priorities.

Kirzinger said that data tracked with results finding Dems have “long had the edge” on health care policy. But she warned Dem presidential candidates' embrace of the so-called “Medicare for All” program could threaten that advantage.

While KFF polling from September shows 53 percent of respondents supported the proposal, which Kirzinger called a “modest” increase over an August poll that found 51 percent supported Medicare for All, she said the electorate was largely uninformed about the substance of the policy.

“Even that modest majority that’s in favor of Medicare or All may not have much staying power once people become aware of the details of any plan or arguments on either side,” she said. “Public support for Medicare for All shifts significantly when people hear arguments about potential tax increases or delays in medical tests and treatment.”

— A panel of partisan pollsters and operatives agreed that winning the messaging battle on health care and the economy is vital to winning the 2020 presidential election.

Dem pollster Celinda Lake said she believed health care is “very strongly a winning issue” for Dems, much like it was in the 2018 midterms. But citing Kirzinger’s data on public perception and knowledge of Medicare for All, Lake said the program is “completely undefined, and it’s a fight for who defines it.”

She said the program’s advantages — guaranteed access to care across the board, no copays or deductibles, preexisting condition coverage and control over prescription drug prices — offered Dems an opportunity to define it in a positive light.

But GOP pollster B.J. Martino highlighted a number of aspects about the program that could make it “problematic for any candidate who has hitched their wagon to Medicare for All.”

“Rather than writing a check to your private insurance, you’re going to cross out private insurance, write IRS and add a zero to your check,” he said, describing a messaging tactic he anticipated Republicans would use. “You’re gonna lose your private insurance, and you’re going to pay more for it.”

Still, GOP operative Brian Reisinger said fighting Dems on health care is like “fighting Santa Claus on Christmas” and Martino added President Trump ultimately would not win reelection running solely on health care.

“We have to hit on it and turn it back to issues like jobs in the economy,” he said.

Martino cited strong support for the president’s economic platform in rural areas but warned “the danger lies for us on the Republican side of letting them feel like they’re carrying an undue share of the burden” created by tariffs and Trump’s trade war with China.

“They are conflicted right now, because they agree that we need to go after China, they haven’t been playing fair for years, but why are we shouldering the burden alone?” he said.

Reisinger said the “cultural shift of the Democrat Party nationally” has made Dems’ economic message hard to sell to rural voters.

“There is a good economic story to tell. It’s been told partially, it hasn’t been told all the way, we need to tell the rest of it, it needs to be done more effectively,” he said. “We also have to be able to leverage and hold on to that advantage that we have in rural Wisconsin.”

Dem pollster Paul Maslin conceded Trump had a “slight advantage” on the economy. But he said forecasts of a recession on the horizon and Trump’s trade war hurting rural voters combined with a campaign that “hasn’t done a very good job” of messaging economic successes.

He conceded there are “big question marks” about Dems’ “ability to be trusted about the economy.”

“This one is very much a ball up in the air,” he said. “What would seemingly have been a strong Trump advantage really isn’t, but it’s unclear that it’s going to swing to us either.”

Hear audio from the luncheon:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics>

— A new poll conducted in Wisconsin for Fox News shows Joe Biden ahead of Donald Trump and respondents split about impeaching the president.

Biden topped Trump 48 percent to 39 percent. Meanwhile, Bernie Sanders was

backed by 45 percent of voters compared to 40 who supported the president. And Elizabeth Warren was supported by 45 percent compared to 41 percent for Trump.

The poll found Trump winning rural voters over Biden by just 2 points after he won among rural voters by 27 points in 2016, when he eked out a 22,748-vote victory in Wisconsin.

Forty-two percent of those surveyed want Trump impeached and removed from office, while 4 percent want him impeached, but not removed. Forty-five percent oppose impeaching the president.

The poll also found 44 percent of Wisconsin voters approve of the job Trump is doing, compared to 54 percent who disapprove.

And Biden was the top choice of Dems for the party's nomination with 28 percent backing him, compared to 22 percent for Warren and 17 percent for Sanders.

The survey of 1,512 Wisconsin voters was conducted Sept. 29-Oct. 2 using live interviews over both landlines and cellphones. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. The margin of error on the Dem primary question was plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

See more:

<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/fox-news-poll-biden-bests-trump-by-nine-points-in-wisconsin>

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson had a contentious interview on “Meet the Press” that included host Chuck Todd asking the Oshkosh Republican why he was pushing a “Fox News conspiracy, propaganda stuff” rather than answering questions.

Johnson accused Todd of a biased setup when the host asked why the senator “winced” when he heard the Trump administration was tying Ukraine aid to investigating Joe Biden and his son.

Johnson also said he was sympathetic to what Trump has gone through and he doesn't trust the FBI or CIA.

Johnson also told Todd that when he asked the president about the prospect of quid pro quo with U.S. aid to the Ukraine, Trump ‘vehemently, adamantly” denied any link. He argued the president has a right to ask foreign governments for assistance to investigate corruption.

“I’m here to report today that, unlike the narrative of the press that President Trump wants to dig up dirt on his 2020 opponent, what he wants is an accounting of what happened in 2016. Who set him up? Did things spring from Ukraine?” Johnson said.

Johnson’s interview drew praise from the president, who tweeted, “Sleepy Eyes Chuck Todd of “Meet the Press” had a total meltdown in his interview with highly respected (sic) Senator [@RonJohnsonWI](#). Seems that a not very bright Chuck just wasn’t getting the answers he was looking for in order to make me look as bad as possible. I did NOTHING wrong!”

U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, knocked Johnson for his comments.

“.@SenRonJohnson doesn’t want to discuss facts or his own knowledge & culpability so he resorts to spinning wild conspiracy theories. He watched Trump’s illegal scheme to extort personal gain for official action transpire in real-time. The people of WI deserve to know the truth,” she tweeted.

See video of the exchange:

<https://t.co/tjLwXg1o8H?amp=1>

— Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald said he believes the impeachment inquiry by House Dems into President Trump’s involvement in Ukraine is a “political witch hunt.”

The Juneau Republican, who last month launched a campaign to succeed retiring U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner in the 5th CD, was asked by reporters on Tuesday about the impeachment push. The inquiry centers on the allegation that Trump pressured the newly elected president of Ukraine to do him a “favor” by investigating political rival Joe Biden and his family.

But Fitzgerald told reporters after a news conference that he didn’t believe Trump had done anything wrong.

“It sounds like everything that was done within that discussion was in the purview of what a president of the United States should be able to do with any foreign diplomat, and it shouldn’t necessarily be made public,” he said.

Fitzgerald told reporters that there are “members of Congress now that are saying they still believe it’s kind of a political witch hunt and that they’re going after the president.” When asked if he believed the inquiry was a “witch hunt,” Fitzgerald replied, “I do.”

“I think it’s just another story that’s going to perpetuate itself probably between now and the end of the election that (Dems are) going to want to investigate,” he said.

The Juneau Republican also suggested Trump wasn’t serious in his public calls last week for China and Ukraine to investigate the Dem presidential frontrunner.

“I think a lot of people would take exception to anyone calling for a foreign government to investigate any political opponent, I get that,” Fitzgerald said. “I think what he was suggesting was something off the cuff that I don’t know that anyone would take it seriously.”

But while Fitzgerald said “everything should be vetted,” he also cast doubt on the legitimacy of the investigation.

“You can continue down the path of exploring all these different items, but whether or not they’re legit, there’s a whole different question or whether or not they’re politically motivated,” he said.

— GOP state Rep. Adam Neylon is passing on a run for the 5th CD, while Dem Margaret Engebretson has decided against a bid in the 7th.

Engebretson, who lost to former GOP Rep. Sean Duffy with 38.5 percent of the vote in 2018, said in a statement if running for Congress “were only a matter of heart, drive and preparedness to serve,” she’d be in. But she said the timing isn’t good for her personally.

“The people I would be honored to serve deserve the best, and right now I cannot give a campaign my 100%,” she said in a statement posted to Twitter.

No Dems have gotten into the race for the special election yet. Those who have been mulling a bid include state Sen. Janet Bewley, of Mason, and Wausau School Board President Tricia Zunker.

On the GOP side, Jason Church, an aide to U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson; businessman Michael Opela; and state Sen. Tom Tiffany, of Hazelhurst; have all announced plans to run.

In the 5th, Neylon said the timing isn't right for a congressional bid and he plans to seek reelection to his Assembly seat next fall.

Neylon, R-Waukesha, worked for retiring U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Menomonee Falls, for three years, rising from a driver to working in his Washington, D.C., office. He said following his footsteps would be an honor, but "the timing is not right for my family and I." Neylon's children are 3 and 1.

"Someone else will be elected to the 5th Congressional District, but Jim will never be replaced," Neylon said. "His legacy will live on, alongside all his accomplishments that made Wisconsin and the country a better place."

Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, is the only GOP candidate to formally enter the race, though Sen. Chris Kapenga, R-Delafield, has been making moves toward a run. Other Republicans who have been considering a bid include: Matt Neumann, son of former U.S. Rep. Mark Neumann; former U.S. Senate candidate Kevin Nicholson; and Ben Voelkel, an aide to U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson.

Dem Tom Palzewicz has announced plans to run again after losing to Sensenbrenner with 38 percent of the vote in 2018.

See Neylon's statement:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2019/neylon-announces-decision-not-to-run-for-wi-5th-congressional-district/>

— U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan called on Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to suspend the pay of the State Department official that prevented EU Ambassador Gordon Sondland from testifying before the House Intelligence Committee.

This came after House Dems requested that Sondland appear before the committee to discuss his knowledge of President Trump's communications with Ukraine and potential quid pro quo involving an investigation into Joe Biden and his son.

Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, told Pompeo whoever was responsible for prohibiting Sondland from testifying is in violation of a Trump-era law that suspends the salaries of federal officials if they've prevented another official from communicating with Congress.

"I believe the person prohibiting Ambassador Sondland from testifying before the House Intelligence Committee is in violation of this statute, and that their salary should be withheld until Ambassador Sondland appears before Congress," Pocan wrote in the letter.

Since Pocan's letter, the White House released its own letter to House Democratic leaders, indicating the Trump administration's refusal to cooperate with the impeachment investigation.

In response, House Dems issued Sondland a subpoena. He is scheduled to appear before Congress next week.

See Pocan's letter: <https://twitter.com/repmarkpocan/status/1181628904345423873>

See the White House's letter:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PAC-Letter-10.08.2019.pdf>

— U.S. Rep. Ron Kind, R-La Crosse, is in Switzerland with a bipartisan group of lawmakers to meet with officials from the World Trade Organization in Geneva.

Kind's office said the trip will include efforts to de-escalate the trade war. He will be in Switzerland through Friday.

See the release:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2019/rep-kind-leads-group-of-bipartisan-lawmakers-on-trip-to-geneva-to-discuss-trade-advocate-for-wisconsins-farmers-businesses-and-workers/>

— U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil called for increased border security during a visit to the U.S.-Mexico border, saying he'll continue to fix what he calls a "broken" immigration system.

The Janesville Republican toured border facilities in El Paso with ICE and Customs and Border Patrol officials.

"While progress has been made to decrease the influx in illegal immigration and illicit drug trafficking, we can do more. Upgrading technology, building physical barriers, and supporting law enforcement are important to address the crisis," Steil said in a release.

This came after Steil voted in favor of President Trump's national emergency declaration earlier this year, which aimed to bypass Congress in funding the construction of a southern border wall.

"I'm grateful to our men and women at CBP and ICE for their work. I will continue working in Congress to fix our broken immigration system," Steil said.

See the release:

<https://steil.house.gov/media/press-releases/steil-visits-us-mexico-border-sees-crisis-firsthand>

Posts of the week

Nothing better than traveling Wisconsin and sampling [#WI](#) cheese all day. Thanks for having me today, Yellowstone! <pic.twitter.com/WvGTTZ1q57>

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [October 8, 2019](#)

Stopped by Swede's in Kenosha for a beef sandwich. Great people and

great food! □ pic.twitter.com/8fTVbHXY6M

— Bryan Steil (@BryanSteil) [October 4, 2019](#)

Cheese curds, cheese sticks, string cheese, cream cheese, sliced cheese, cubed cheese, wheel of cheese, nacho cheese, grilled cheese, mac and cheese, cheese pizza, cheese burger, cheese dip, cheese puffs, cheese cake...

That's, that's about it. [#AmericanCheeseMonth](#)
pic.twitter.com/QE6gA7ChiU

— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [October 9, 2019](#)

ICYMI

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['It's not normal': Wisconsin congressman Mark Pocan says Trump must be impeached even if it hurts Democrats](#)

[Steil reaches out about impeachment](#)