

Bill Kaplan: Trump has failed Wisconsin

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At a Milwaukee rally, Trump defended his risky Iranian policies and raged at critics. Classic disjointed rabble-rousing. Then Trump apparently remembered he was in the key battleground state of Wisconsin: "I love the people of Wisconsin." Trump pitched his campaign: "Promises made, promises kept." Trump bragged that "our economy is booming, wages are rising, poverty is plummeting, crime is falling and America is the envy of the entire world" (WisPolitics). He exclaimed: "You've got to love Trump. You've got to love Trump."

However, if Trump and Wisconsin GOP politicians at the rally are so confident of success, why rush to purge more than 200,000 voters from Wisconsin's voter rolls because of supposed faulty addresses? The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that many of these voters are disproportionately concentrated in Democratic-leaning Madison and Milwaukee. And, the Associated Press quoted Justin Clark, a Trump campaign official: "Traditionally it's always been Republicans suppressing votes in places" (audio recording).

Moreover, what about Trump's self-touted Wisconsin economic record? The NYT reported: "But in reality, dairy farmers in the state have been struggling since he took office" (Wisconsin has lost over 1,900 dairy farms under Trump). Dairy farmers' cost of production is greater than the price they receive. And, the weather (extreme rain and flooding) has made their lives miserable. Finally, Trump's trade wars produced no winners, just loss of export markets and economic hardship for rural Wisconsin.

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Holds true for other Wisconsin farmers reeling from retaliatory tariffs on corn, cranberries, ginseng, kidney beans and soybeans, as well as beef and pork. Farm income has been falling across rural America, with Wisconsin leading in small farm bankruptcies. Moreover, the richest (big) farmers nationally received most of Trump's trade war aid (Washington Post). Wisconsin farmers got a pittance (MJS).

With elections looming in November, Trump signed a trade war truce with China and an earlier enhanced trade agreement with Canada and Mexico. However, Trump will continue tariffs on 65 percent of what the U.S. imports from China and in turn the Chinese will maintain retaliatory tariffs on 57 percent of what China imports from the U.S. (NYT). Some truce. Will Wisconsin farmers regain lost export markets?

The picture is not much different for Wisconsin factory workers. The trade wars have impacted the manufacturing sector, dependent on foreign suppliers for parts and raw materials. Wisconsin is losing factory jobs despite Trump's claim that he is bringing factory jobs back to the state. The NYT reported: "Wisconsin, where 10 counties that (Trump) won in 2016 lost manufacturing jobs" The newspaper also noted that Wisconsin counties that voted for Obama and then Trump are losing factory jobs.

Then there is Foxconn. Although Trump once called the planned Foxconn factory in Wisconsin the "eighth wonder of the world", he didn't mention it in Milwaukee. Why? Only a downsized factory is being built, employing far fewer workers than announced. Will Trump's appeal to blue-collar workers and farmers diminish and impact 2020 elections? No wonder Trump is pitching fool's gold.

Trump has failed Wisconsin.

-Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.