DC Wrap: Federal lawmakers from Wisconsin back Evers' request for stockpiled medical supplies

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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: https://forms.gle/YLYZtJWHPSt24HhZ7

Quotes of the week

"They've told us right now that they don't have test kits for folks in Afghanistan, and given the proximity to the Iranian border and the conditions in some of those Afghan cities, I think it's unconscionable."
-U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan on the federal government's lack of COVID-19 testing on military personnel stationed overseas.

"Right now, all people are hearing about are the deaths. I'm sure the deaths are horrific, but the flip side of this is the vast majority of people who get coronavirus do survive … We don't shut down our economies because tens of thousands of people die from the common flu."
-U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson on the dangers of overreacting to the coronavirus outbreak.

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This week's news

— Federal lawmakers from Wisconsin are backing Gov. Tony Evers' request for medical supplies from the national reserve stockpile.

In a letter to Robert Kadlec, the assistant secretary for preparedness and response at the federal Department of Health and Human Services, seven of the delegation's nine lawmakers applauded the "important public health measures" Evers has taken.

But they noted Wisconsin "is running critically low on the supplies" Evers requested the federal government provide from the Strategic National Stockpile.

Evers requested: 54,709 N95 respirators; 130,326 surgical masks; 24,816 face shields; 20,233 surgical gowns; 104 coveralls; and 72,044 gloves.

The group asked Kadlec when the state would receive the supplies and how the Trump administration plans to replenish the stockpile and respond to other critical shortages, among other things.

"Our governor, mayors, and county executives have taken aggressive steps to slow the spread of COVID-19," the group wrote. "It is incumbent upon us to ensure that they have the resources needed to protect the health of all Wisconsinites."

The letter was signed by each member of the delegation except U.S. Reps. Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Menomonee Falls, and Glenn Grothman, R-Glenbeulah.

Spokesmen for Sensenbrenner and Grothman were not immediately available for comment.

See the letter [here.](#)

— The U.S. Senate rejected U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson's proposal to overhaul the House coronavirus bill by removing a paid leave mandate and instead order states to expand eligibility for unemployment benefits.

The amendment failed yesterday afternoon 50-48 with 60 votes needed for passage. The Senate then approved the House bill 90-8 with Johnson opposed. President Trump signed it into law last night.

Johnson joined fellow Republicans Pat Toomey, of Pennsylvania, Mike Lee, of Utah, Ben Sasse, of Nebraska, and Rick Scott, of Florida, in introducing the amendment.

The amendment called for creating a Temporary Emergency Federal Unemployment

Insurance Program. That would mean states expanding eligibility for unemployment benefits for those who can't work due to the coronavirus.

The amendment also called for benefits that are the lesser of two-thirds someone's average weekly earnings of $1,000 and would last up to 14 weeks.

The federal government would then reimburse states for the costs of the expanded program.

The House bill calls for businesses providing sick leave and then receiving tax credits to cover the cost. It also includes free testing for the virus.

Johnson said he opposed the bill because the Senate didn't address what he called "the major problem" with the legislation.

"Now that the House bill passed unamended, laid-off workers will get far less from state benefits, and many employers will be forced to shoulder a financial burden they cannot afford," Johnson said.

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, voted against Johnson's amendment and for the House bill on final passage.

— Baldwin and 17 of her Dem Senate colleagues wrote to Senate leaders urging direct cash payments to Americans.

"We must provide direct cash support to the American workers and families who need it most – to help them purchase essentials; pay the rent, mortgage, and bills; and otherwise weather the coming weeks and months," the senators wrote.

They are calling for a $2,000 immediate payment for every adult, child and non-child dependent. It would begin to phase out at higher income levels, though the letter didn't specify an income amount.

The plan also calls for a second payment of $1,500 if the public health emergency continues into July or unemployment in June is at least 1 point higher than the three-month average from December 2019 to February 2020. That average was just more than 3.5 percent.

The second payment would drop to $750 if unemployment was 0.5 points higher than the December-February average.

The plan also calls for additional quarterly payments if certain conditions are met.

Read the letter [here.](#)

— U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher said the nation's testing for novel coronavirus has been deficient, and lawmakers need to look into it to keep it from happening again.

"I think there were clear deficiencies in the testing process," the Green Bay Republican said in an interview aired Sunday on "UpFront," produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

"It took a while for guidance to get there; certain kits didn't have the requisite RNA samples to do the testing," he said. "When the dust settles, I do think we need to take a look at our testing capacity and make sure that we fix things so we don't find ourselves in this position again."

Gallagher also urged people to be careful about where they are getting their information during the pandemic.

"Every member of Congress, really everyone in public office should play the role of facilitating the best information out there. There's so much misinformation online, right now," he said.

He encouraged people to listen to their local and state health experts, and experts from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

— U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore announced she is self-quarantining after coming in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

According to Moore's office, the Milwaukee Dem on March 8 came into contact with a person who tested positive for the virus. Moore was told by her physician she is at low risk of contracting coronavirus since she did not come into physical contact with

the person.

Still, spokeswoman Samara Sheff said Moore is "taking all the necessary precautions" and has isolated herself in Milwaukee. Sheff didn't have details on when Moore will return to Washington.

Sheff said Moore's Washington office is being manned by one person and the remainder of the staff is working from home.

Posts of the week

To fight the #coronavirus, Wisconsin needs respirators, masks, gloves and other medical supplies from our Strategic National Stockpile. I'm leading the WI delegation in calling on @HHSgov to support @GovEvers immediately and send these critical supplies to Wisconsin. pic.twitter.com/VSYs6WN1sx

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) March 18, 2020

An informative article on the importance of social distancing. Learn how you, our community, and nation can slow the spread of #coronavirus and keep the most vulnerable healthy: https://t.co/vU3bkndoQ9

— Bryan Steil (@RepBryanSteil) March 15, 2020

Please don't do this.

Listen to the experts.

Practice social distancing and protects others—especially the most vulnerable—not just yourself. https://t.co/DKA0QrtB7j

https://t.co/Yeawx9B9uf

— Rep. Mark Pocan (@RepMarkPocan) March 15, 2020

Yesterday the President and CDC issued new guidelines to help combat this outbreak. I encourage everyone to read and follow these guidelines carefully in the coming weeks. Each one of us has a part to play in slowing the spread of coronavirus. #PrepareDontPanic pic.twitter.com/LQNPIRTKxl

— Rep. Gallagher Press Office (@RepGallagher) March 17, 2020

Last night, I was informed that someone I came into contact with on March 8th tested positive for COVID-19. I didn't physically contact this individual and I consulted with the Office of the Attending Physician, who informed me that my risk for contracting COVID-19 is low. (1/5) pic.twitter.com/uYweLvj18k

— Rep. Gwen Moore (@RepGwenMoore) March 16, 2020

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Tammy Baldwin would be the ideal vice presidential choice for Joe Biden

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Archbishop distances the church from 'Catholics for Trump' Coalitions, which will launch in Milwaukee

[Congresswoman Moore calls Sen. Johnson a 'conspiracy theorist' and 'embarrassment'](#)

[Rep. Pocan: Military does not have test kits for soldiers in Afghanistan](#)