

# Bill Kaplan: American Rescue Plan will help all of Wisconsin

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The American Rescue Plan (ARP) provides substantial funding to end the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant economic downturn. Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin said: “The fact that Wisconsin Republicans in the House (and Senate) oppose this support for a ‘blue state’ like Wisconsin shows that they are more interested in playing partisan politics when we should be doing everything we can to deliver help for our state and local communities. ... We’re doing that universally throughout the country – doesn’t matter if the state (is) red, purple or blue.”

The U.S. leads the world with 29.3+ million COVID-19 cases and 533,000+ deaths. Wisconsin has had 569,000+ cases and 6,538+ deaths. The economic fallout has been catastrophic. Wisconsin “still hasn’t recovered nearly a third of jobs lost at the height of layoffs in April 2020” (Wisconsin Public Radio). And, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities said: 334,000 adult Wisconsinites had “difficulty getting enough food” for their families, 156,000 Wisconsinites are “not caught up on rent” and 1,219,000 Wisconsinites are having “difficulty covering usual household expenses.” Moreover, hundreds of dairy farms continue to fail (more than 2,000 under the previous administration).

However, Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson thinks the ARP is “unneeded and unwise.” Long considered a laughingstock, Johnson doesn’t hear the cries for help from the middle class, the poor, farmers or retirees. Johnson’s only legislative accomplishment was to make the 2017 \$1.9 trillion tax cuts more skewed to the rich. The ARP in contrast helps all of Wisconsin, including rural areas.

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The ARP sends \$3.2 billion for Wisconsin (state), plus an additional \$2.3 billion to local and tribal governments. Senator Baldwin, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture-Rural Development, said: “The American Rescue Plan delivers ... federal funding for food supply chain resiliency ... to address major pandemic-related disruptions ... .” Moreover, ARP direct checks, child tax credits, funding safe school openings, aid to small businesses and help for the unemployed apply to urban and rural Wisconsin.

The conservative American Farm Bureau emphasized specifically how the ARP helps rural communities: “For agriculture, more than \$10 billion is appropriated to purchase and distribute agricultural products such as fresh produce, milk and dairy products, seafood, eggs and meat to individuals in need domestically and abroad, assist in COVID-19 mitigation efforts for agricultural workers, improve rural healthcare, and provide debt forgiveness for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.”

Wisconsin Democratic Representative Ron Kind joined Baldwin in hailing ARP healthcare provisions — increasing funding to defeat COVID-19 and expanding healthcare coverage. Affordable Care Act (ACA) premiums are greatly reduced for ACA private insurance, there are new generous fiscal incentives for Wisconsin and 11 other states to expand Medicaid and funding to help rural hospitals. Already Wyoming GOP state legislators are moving to take advantage and expand Medicaid. Can Wisconsin GOP state legislators grasp that COVID-19 has changed circumstances and use ARP funding to expand Medicaid? Fiscal and moral common sense. President Joe Biden consistently said he would govern for all Americans – ARP confirms his commitment.

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