

# Bill Kaplan: Bipartisan infrastructure plan gains momentum

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The bipartisan infrastructure plan has gained momentum: The House Democratic-GOP Problem Solvers Caucus, which includes Wisconsin GOP Representatives Mike Gallagher and Bryan Steil, “strongly supports the Senate infrastructure framework ... .” The group also touted a business-labor coalition that endorsed the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure plan: “A broad coalition of organizations across the political spectrum have come together to support this framework to grow our small businesses, create American jobs, advance economic growth and improve the quality of life for every American.”

The business-labor coalition implored: “We urge Congress to turn this framework into legislation that will be signed into law, and ... are committed to helping see this cross the finish line. ... Don’t let partisan differences get in the way of action – pass significant, meaningful infrastructure legislation now.” Its members include the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable, National Association of Manufacturers, National Retail Federation, American Society of Civil Engineers, AFL-CIO and Building Trades Unions. A huge deal.

Moreover, Ohio GOP Senator Rob Portman, an architect of the infrastructure plan, said: “I think it’s a compelling framework ... . People want to see our infrastructure improved. They’re tired of waiting in traffic during their rush hour commute. They’re tired of the bridges ... well beyond their usefulness ... . People are tired of worrying about lead pipes.” However, Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson will not follow Portman’s lead. Johnson is an adamant obstructionist who has absolutely no interest in working with GOP moderates, let alone Democrats.

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In sharp contrast, Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin has wholeheartedly endorsed the “blue-collar blueprint” for infrastructure. In an op-ed for the Wisconsin State Journal, Baldwin wrote: “More than 1,949 miles of Wisconsin highways and 979 bridges are in poor condition and in need of rebuilding. ... Over 100 cities, towns and villages in the state still have lead laterals that need to be replaced. From Bloomer to Baraboo, and from Ripon to Racine, ... their work at the local level needs federal funding and support. (Moreover), too many families, small businesses and farmers across rural Wisconsin do not have affordable access to reliable, high-speed broadband service.”

Baldwin is all in on getting the bipartisan infrastructure plan passed this year. She will push for “buy America” requirements. That means jobs for Wisconsin workers and support for Wisconsin manufacturers. And, Baldwin strongly supports a “more climate resilient infrastructure.” Finally, the White House said: “In addition to being the largest long-term investment in nearly a century ... (it) is a generational investment in rural America.”

It is long past time to end the rural-suburban-urban divide in Wisconsin. The bipartisan infrastructure plan will help all of Wisconsin. Rural areas and inner-cities will get high-speed Internet. Everyone will have access to clean, safe drinking water. Repair of crumbling roads and bridges will help urban commuters get to work and farmers to sell their products. And, expansion of rail will facilitate travel for all.

We are all Americans. We can do this. Time to put America before political party.

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