

# Bill Kaplan: Congress must invest in infrastructure and people now

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Massachusetts Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy, a legislative giant, said: “Never let the perfect be the enemy of the good.” Perhaps that legislative principle is finally sinking in among fractious congressional Democrats. The Washington Post reported: “Democrats coalesce as spending bill (“Build Back Better” framework) does likewise. Votes on a \$1.75 trillion plan may be days away, but party tensions linger.”

This good news is an antidote to the House Progressive Caucus, including Wisconsin Democratic Representative Mark Pocan, on Thursday again blocking a vote on the Senate-passed bipartisan infrastructure bill. President Biden and House Speaker Pelosi were clear that the two-month delay has confused and disheartened many Americans. Inaction has also left Democratic leaders weakened, impacted negatively Virginia Democratic gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe and lost time for Democrats to explain their agenda to voters.

Red lines in the sand are not the way to go with a 50-50 Senate Democratic majority or a Democratic-led House which can only afford to lose 3 Democratic votes. Moreover, all congressional Republicans have decided to “take shots from the sidelines” (NYT) and hope for a Democratic train wreck. Failure is not an option. So the shift in Democratic positioning is very positive. The Washington Post reported: “By late Friday, lawmakers had not issued any policy ultimatums, offering an encouraging sign about the road ahead.”

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The “Build Back Better” framework announced by Biden is historic and transformative. Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin tweeted the highlights: “Making the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, investing in Pre-K, more affordable child care, home care and health care, cutting taxes for working families, taking on the climate crisis, and creating good-paying clean energy jobs.” A one-year extension of the child tax credit will be huge for the estimated “1.1 million Wisconsin children eligible to receive (a) monthly Child Tax Credit payment ...” (Wisconsin Budget Project). And 91,000 Wisconsinites denied health care by the GOP-led legislature’s refusal to expand Medicaid will finally get affordable quality health care coverage. These working, low-income Wisconsinites will be able to purchase Affordable Care Act (ACA) private insurance with no monthly premium. Moreover, most middle and working-class Wisconsinites buying ACA private insurance will continue to get more help to reduce their premiums.

Now that the Democratic-led Congress appears to have agreed on the “Build Back Better” framework, it’s time for the House to approve the bipartisan “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act” (IIJA). The Wisconsin Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers said: “This bipartisan infrastructure legislation would provide much-needed funding for projects across the state of Wisconsin (and) urges the House to pass the historic IIJA for the well-being of our communities.”

The legislation will give Wisconsin: \$5.2 billion for repairing and rebuilding roads, \$225 million for bridge repairs and replacement, over \$590 million for public transit, \$100+ million for broadband coverage, \$841 million for water infrastructure, \$198 million for airports, \$79 million for a state electric vehicle charging network and much more,

A Democratic-led Congress is about to deliver on commitments and promises.

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