

Bill Kaplan: Johnson misinforms, Baldwin legislates

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Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson is a cheerleader for chaos, dysfunction and misinformation. He has become the Senate's leading crackpot. In contrast, Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin is a problem solving legislator, willing to compromise and negotiate to get results. Importantly, Baldwin is a fighter for bread-and-butter issues, laser-focused on Wisconsin's economy.

The Congress has averted several man-made disasters hawked by Johnson. It avoided a government shutdown by passing stopgap funding. The Democratic-led House voted yes on a party line vote. The Wisconsin delegation split along party lines. However, the Senate passed the funding bill with a strong bipartisan majority 69-28. Nineteen GOP senators joined all fifty Democrats, including Baldwin, in voting yes. But once again, Johnson was howling at the moon about COVID-19 vaccinations and voted no.

Later, the Congress began the critical process of raising the debt ceiling. It has always been raised to finance borrowing for spending already authorized by the Congress. In this case, raising the debt ceiling was needed to cover the \$8 trillion debt added under Trump. Default would have led to an economic catastrophe: higher interest rates, recession and insufficient funds to pay for defense and Social Security. The Democratic-led House voted yes on a party line vote. The Wisconsin delegation again split along party lines. But the Senate acted in a bipartisan manner, with ten Republicans and forty-nine Democrats, including Baldwin, voting yes. Johnson remained an outlier, voting no.

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Moreover, Johnson added to that debt by supporting the \$2 trillion Trump tax cuts, skewed to corporations and the wealthy. Johnson, a former accountant, made the tax cuts even more tilted to the rich by adding a 20 percent deduction for pass-through businesses. The deduction facilitates tax cheating by gaming the system. Another gain for plutocrats.

In contrast, Baldwin is focused on bread-and-butter issues for regular folks. She is fixed on Wisconsin as the Senate debates the Build Back Better Act (BBBA). Baldwin is fighting to have the new electric postal vehicles, authorized by BBBA, built in Oshkosh. It's an uphill fight, but Baldwin doesn't duck a battle to help the middle class.

Baldwin is also making certain that the BBBA helps many other Wisconsinites. She tweeted: "The Child Tax Credit I worked to expand, lifted children out of poverty and put money in the pockets of families across Wisconsin to support themselves and our economy. Now we need to pass Build Back Better to extend these tax cuts for working families." Baldwin pushed for BBBA funding home healthcare for seniors and individuals with disabilities. Finally, Baldwin strongly supports the BBBA extending healthcare coverage through widening enrollment and generous private insurance premium subsidies under the Affordable Care Act, along with funding more physicians for rural Wisconsin.

While Johnson peddles mouthwash to "kill the coronavirus," Baldwin takes her governmental obligations and responsibilities seriously. She's not alone. New Hampshire GOP Governor Chris Sununu, referring to Johnson's mouthwash misinformation, said: "When crazy comes knocking at the door, slam it shut." Will any Wisconsin Republicans rebut Johnson?

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