

# Bill Kaplan: Speaker Vos postures, President Biden delivers

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GOP Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, pretending to overturn supposed “illegal executive overreach” by Wisconsin Democratic Governor Tony Evers, did it again. Vos led the effort to blowup a compromise COVID-19 relief bill agreed to by Evers and the GOP-led state Senate. Then Vos and the GOP-led legislature repealed the mask mandate, saying it was “not about (Evers’) mask order.” Poppycock! If Vos and other GOP legislators really supported wearing masks they could vote for a Democratic-sponsored bill “to reinstate the use of face coverings to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (including increasingly contagious virus variants).”

Democratic state Senator Jon Erpenbach said: “As elected officials, we took an oath to protect the lives of Wisconsin citizens and Republicans should have no problem supporting this bill.” Even with improved vaccination, Wisconsin is still fighting the pandemic: 550,000+ cases, 6,000+ dead. The science prove masks work. 11 GOP-led states have mask mandates.

Moreover, Vos’ politicking led to other dire problems. Repeal of Evers’ emergency order on masking jeopardized about \$50 million per month in federal food assistance for 243,000 Wisconsinites. Other federal aid for transit funding may also be threatened by GOP games. Moreover, GOP legislators tried to shift the blame to Evers for this fallout, including reimposition of a one-week waiting period for jobless claims. Senate Minority Leader Janet Bewley rebuked Republicans: “It’s their policy.”

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Similar nonsense transpired in Congress. GOP House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy refused to penalize Georgia GOP Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene for her anti-Semitic, racist and murderous rants and threats. Greene said California's terrible wildfires were caused by Jewish bankers using a space laser, and "liked" a Facebook post calling for "a bullet to the head" of Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. UW-Madison political science professor Eleanor Neff Powell said: "Typically the party (of the offending member) has asked the person to step aside, they've taken the vote themselves (to discipline), and then the chamber as a whole takes the vote to confirm that action."

However, McCarthy pretended the problem was that Democrats wanted Greene removed from House committees, rather than Greene's conduct and his inaction. This forced the hand of the Democratic-led House. It voted 230-199 to remove Greene from House committees. Only 11 GOP representatives (none from Wisconsin) joined all Democrats, including Wisconsin's. Wisconsin GOP Representative Mike Gallagher shamefully voted no, ignoring McCarthy's inaction. Gallagher disingenuously said: "I'm not sure we should want to set the precedent of another party being able to remove people from their committee assignments, no matter how outlandish (murdering Pelosi) their comments."

But there's hope. A \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 recovery plan has moved forward in Congress. It includes help for the 10 million who lost their jobs, nearly 8 million additional poor, funding to reopen schools safely, healthcare coverage expansion and paid sick-family leave, relief to small business, assistance for local-state governments and public health funding. Wisconsin congressional Democrats voted yes while state Republicans opposed. President Joe Biden will sign it. He delivers. Political games vs. tangible benefits for struggling Americans.

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