

# Bill Kaplan: U.S. Sen. Johnson disparages bipartisan infrastructure plan as socialist

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President Biden came to La Crosse to pitch a bipartisan infrastructure plan on the 65th anniversary of GOP President Eisenhower's signing legislation creating the Interstate Highway System. Biden said: "That was the last infrastructure investment of the size and scope of ... the agreement I'm about to talk about today."

Biden spoke to all Americans: "After months of careful negotiation, of listening, of compromising together in good faith, moving together, with ups and downs and some blips, a bipartisan group of senators (5 Republicans and 5 Democrats) got together and they forged an agreement to move forward on the key priorities of my American Jobs Plan (infrastructure) ... ."

However, Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson paid no heed to what Biden said. Johnson, acting more like an extremist buffoon than a senator, denounced Biden's supposed "socialist policies." Earlier, Johnson said: "I'd do what I could to frustrate its passage." Moreover, Fortune magazine rated Johnson adamantly opposed to an infrastructure deal. But Johnson is out of step with other GOP senators who want to help problem-solve.

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Ohio GOP Senator Rob Portman, an architect of the bipartisan infrastructure plan, said: "Washington has been talking about truly modernizing our infrastructure for decades. This week Republicans and Democrats agreed on an historic bipartisan

framework and we should pass it.” And, Louisiana GOP Senator Bill Cassidy, another supporter of the plan, said: “It is actually going to provide the infrastructure that American people want, that they need, that will make our country more prosperous for all Americans.”

The nonpartisan and highly regarded American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) rated U.S. infrastructure: “C-, as you might imagine, is not something to be particularly proud of. There’s a great need for improvement.” Moreover, the Wisconsin Section of ASCE issued a 2020 Report Card for Wisconsin’s Infrastructure. The overall GPA is a C, “mediocre, requires attention.” The specifics are damning. For example:

- Roads D+: “More than one-third of these roads are in fair or below condition and deterioration is likely to continue over the next ten years. ... Deficient roads cost drivers \$6 billion annually due to wear and tear on vehicles, wasted fuel due to congestion and the overall cost of crashes on roadways.”
- Bridges C+: Wisconsin has “more than 1,000 bridges ... that are considered structurally deficient ... 1,995 bridges in Wisconsin that require repair ... .”
- Drinking water C-: Wisconsin “must contend with aging water treatment and distribution systems ... . Lead, bacteria, nitrates, (PFAS – toxic chemicals), arsenic and radium are some of the water quality concerns ... .” Found throughout Wisconsin, lead pipes and associated lead poisoning cause reduced IQ and attention span, reading and learning disabilities, hyperactivity and behavior problems.

Biden highlighted how fixing these and other infrastructure problems (high-speed Internet, mass transit, power grid and more) will create “good-paying jobs” in Wisconsin. It will be funded in part by substantially increasing the IRS budget to crack down on wealthy cheats. Is Johnson opposed to these cheats paying their fair share?

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