

DC Wrap: Dem Party strategist Joe Zepecki talks Dem candidates to take on GOP in 2022

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Welcome to our weekly DC Wrap, where we write about Wisconsin's congressional delegation. Sign up here to receive the newsletter directly:

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Quotes of the week

“Most of us are speculating that he’ll be too busy defending himself in various courts to do it, but the fact that he can spend the next four years dangling political contributions and threats and recruiting more Trumpian-like folk for various red states in the heartland is completely frightening.”

– U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, referring to former President Donald Trump’s significant political influence despite failing to secure a second term.

“And, again, anybody that thinks I’ve spread disinformation is uninformed because I haven’t. And anybody who’s going to level that charge ought to offer proof, and they won’t be able to offer proof because I haven’t. We’ve been meticulously careful.”

– U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, responding to questions in a New York Times interview on Johnson’s views of the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol riots and protests.

This week’s news

— Democratic Party strategist Joe Zepecki says Dems have a number of candidates to take on GOP congressional candidates in coming elections.

Zepecki in an interview with WisPolitics.com said the Dem Party has at least half a dozen good candidates to choose from to take on U.S. Sen Ron Johnson and GOP House members in the 2022 elections. Those Dem candidates will have a good shot at beating those GOP congressmen because Dems will likely get to take most of the credit for the pandemic recovery effort, he said.

“There’s a reason that this (2022 elections) is viewed as one of the top pickup opportunities for Democrats in the entire country, and it’s for good reason,” he said.

He said those candidates could have an even better shot against Republicans who have aligned themselves more with Donald Trump than with moderate Republicans, such as U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Allouez, who has both criticized and defended Trump some policies.

He added Milwaukee Bucks executive Alex Lasry and Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson are good candidates to take on the Oshkosh Republican if he decides to run for a third term or any other GOP candidate.

But he also said potential Dem congressional candidates include State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes and U.S. Rep. Ron Kind, D-La Crosse..

Zepecki added improving health care, bolstering education and addressing climate change without negatively impacting the economy will be some of the biggest election issues, in addition to pandemic recovery.

“We’re going to come roaring out of this, maybe sooner than some people thought. And the American people are going to know that Republicans wanted no part of being part of the solution,” he said.

Listen to the interview [here](#).

— Wisconsin’s state and local governments, along with its educational institutions, could receive \$8.7 billion from the latest federal COVID-19 stimulus bill, according to an estimate from the Legislative Fiscal Bureau.

A new LFB memo summarized the package’s wide-ranging impact on programs from child abuse prevention grants to aid for the humanities. But it didn’t include a summary of the overall pot of money the state could receive.

LFB put together the \$8.7 billion total at the request of WisPolitics.com, though Director Bob Lang stressed it was an estimate and comes with some caveats. For example, the state is in line for \$188.7 million from a capital projects fund. But it would first have to apply for the money through a process the U.S. Department of

Treasury has nearly two months to set up.

The estimate doesn't include the stimulus checks that residents received as part of the latest package, nor the \$1 billion sweetener the package includes for states like Wisconsin if they expand Medicaid through the Affordable Care Act. Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, has already ruled out the move.

The biggest pots of money include: \$3.2 billion for the state; \$2.3 billion for counties and municipalities; \$1.5 billion for public K-12 schools; and \$560 million for Wisconsin colleges and universities.

See more [here](#).

— Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, threatened the GOP-controlled Legislature will have “no choice but to go to court” if Gov. Tony Evers vetoes legislation that would give lawmakers oversight of how federal money is spent under a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 bill.

Vos called it unconstitutional for the gov to spend dollars without legislative oversight, as the Wisconsin Constitution dictates no dollars may be spent without an appropriation.

“If you vote no, you’re basically saying ‘what’s the point of having a Legislature?’” he said. “We have a chance to fix it now. If for some reason the governor vetoes this bill, we will have no choice but to go to court.”

See more [here](#).

— U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, introduced a bill to stop the expansion of “junk” insurance plans that do not cover pre-existing conditions or essential health care services.

Baldwin introduced the No Junk Plans Act to overturn a Trump policy that expanded insurance companies' ability to offer health insurance plans that did not adhere to Affordable Care Act consumer protections and denied coverage for pre-existing conditions. Those plans are also not required to offer coverage of essential services

such as maternity or emergency care.

“With nearly 30 million Americans diagnosed with COVID-19, we should be working during this pandemic, and after, to expand quality, affordable health care that provides all of the guaranteed protections and essential benefits of the Affordable Care Act,” Baldwin said. “Junk insurance plans don’t and we need to stop their expansion so people don’t get stuck paying thousands of dollars out of pocket when they need health care.”

The bill has support from more than half of her Dem colleagues in the Senate.

See the [release](#).

— Baldwin also praised the federal pandemic relief bill for including provisions she pushed to protect retirement funds for thousands of Wisconsinites.

The Madison Dem said she helped ensure roughly 22,500 Wisconsinites will get to keep their pensions and retirement funds by fighting for provisions in the American Rescue Plan that were taken from the Butch Lewis Emergency Pension Plan Relief Act.

“This is a big deal, and I am so proud that now these Wisconsin workers and retirees have the peace of mind of knowing that their pensions will be there for them and for their families when they need it. A pension is a promise and it should be kept,” Baldwin said.

Those retirement funds were vulnerable because the pandemic impact has put extra strain on both the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation multiemployer programs and single-employer plans.

Those provisions would:

- *Secure retirement benefits of workers and retirees in multiemployer pension plans for 30 years with no cuts to the earned benefits of participants and beneficiaries;
- *Stabilize the PBGC’s multiemployer pension program for at least 20 years; and
- *Provide necessary relief for single-employer pension plans.

“I worked for six years with Wisconsin workers and retirees to make sure they would

get the pensions that they worked for and earned, and finally, we were able to get this done in the American Rescue Plan,” she added.

See the [release](#).

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, in an “UpFront” interview said he has no regrets over his recent remarks that some called racist.

Johnson told the syndicated “Joe Pags Show” that he was not worried during the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, a riot carried out by mostly white supporters of former President Trump. But if the crowd had been Black Lives Matter or “antifa” protesters, Johnson said, he “might have been a little concerned.”

“There were no racial undertones in my comments,” Johnson told WISN 12 reporter Matt Smith.

“So I know the left is exploiting that. But there weren’t. This is about riots and comparing the rioting we saw throughout the summer,” Johnson said.

“I was just making the distinction between the people that I know — that I personally know that support President Trump, that would never even contemplate breaking the law. Those people love this country,” Johnson said.

See more [here](#).

— Johnson is adding two Trump administration vets to his Senate staff as senior communications advisers.

Vanessa Ambrosini most recently worked for the U.S. Department of Commerce as deputy director of public affairs for the secretary. A Marquette University grad, she previously worked as an aide in the Wisconsin Legislature and under former Gov. Scott Walker.

Alexa Henning served as director of media affairs on Trump’s campaign after serving as assistant communications director and director of broadcast media at the White House.

— Johnson is also heading to the southwest border of the U.S. to evaluate the situation at the border with Mexico.

See the [release](#).

— The state's five GOP House members sent a letter to Evers raising concerns about COVID-19 death counts at nursing homes.

The Evers administration has been facing GOP criticism for a lag in accurately reporting COVID-19 infection and death numbers for nursing homes. The criticism comes after administration efforts to clean up past data took nearly 1,000 deaths that had been listed in the “unknown” location category and properly slotted them into the category for nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

The five GOP House members said the “failure to accurately classify these deaths obscured the truly dire situation in Wisconsin’s long-term care facilities.”

The five wrote the numbers — along with what they said were delays in vaccinating those in assisted living facilities — prompted concerns “that Wisconsin’s reputation as a leader in COVID19 vaccine distribution has been diminished.”

Republicans were harshly critical of the Evers administration’s early rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. But the state has gone from one of the worst in the nation to one of the best.

Evers tweeted Wisconsin “continues to be #1 in the country for getting available #COVID19 vaccine shots in arms. As of this weekend, more than 1 in 4 Wisconsinites—nearly 1.5 million people—have received at least one dose. As eligibility expands even further today, it’s only upward from here!”

Read the [letter](#).

— U.S. Reps. Mike Gallagher and Glenn Grothman also signed a letter demanding House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., cease her support of an

investigation into Iowa's recent congressional election.

The letter, penned by U.S. Rep. Ashley Hinson, R-Iowa, slams Pelosi's support of an investigation into the legitimacy of Iowa's recent congressional election after Iowa Dem Rita Hart lost to GOP U.S. Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks by six votes.

The letter is signed by 124 GOP members in all.

None of the Dem member offices of Wisconsin's House delegation responded to requests by WisPolitics.com for comments on the election.

See the [letter](#).

— Gallagher also introduced a resolution to honor Vietnam War veterans.

Gallagher and his Republican colleagues in the House introduced the resolution to honor those vets by designating every last Saturday of March as "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day." That day falls on March 27 this year.

Legislators picked the date to mark the day when the last U.S. soldier returned to the U.S. from Vietnam. The resolution is also meant to honor those soldiers who did not receive a hero's welcome home as the war effort was harshly criticized.

"Vietnam veterans did not receive the welcome home they deserved. While our country has come a long way in celebrating the men and women in our armed forces, it's past time to honor the courage and sacrifice those who served in Vietnam," Gallagher, a U.S. Marine Corps. veteran, said.

See the [release](#).

— Milwaukee Dem Rep. Gwen Moore also pushed for support from Vice President Kamala Harris on a measure to help end race-based hair discrimination.

Moore, Wisconsin's first and currently only Black woman member of Congress, said she is again introducing The Creating an Open and Respectful World for Natural Hair

or CROWN Act to help end racial discrimination based on hairstyles.

Moore also signed a letter to VP Harris asking her to use her powerful position to push for the act to be signed by President Biden. The signatures on the letter belonged to five congresswomen in all.

The act would:

- *Provide research, statistics, and precedents to define and prohibit hair discrimination in the workplace, schools, and housing to enforce the protection of civil rights;
- *Prohibit discrimination based on an individual's style or texture of hair;
- *Provide clear definitions that describe the enforcement mechanisms of the bill.

“In schools, hair discrimination plays a role in the higher rates of school discipline Black youth, in particular Black girls, experience. Black students are disciplined at a rate four times higher than any other racial or ethnic group, creating harmful breaks in their classroom continuity at best, and giving students their first brushes with the criminal justice system at worst,” the letter to Harris says.

See the [release](#).

— The state Senate Government Operations, Legal Review and Consumer Protection Committee had a public hearing on two calls to amend the U.S. Constitution.

One includes a call for a convention to add an amendment establishing term limits for members of Congress, while the other calls for a convention for one or more amendments to restrain abuses of power by the federal government.

See the hearing [notice](#).

— Baldwin and Johnson split four times on the five Senate confirmation votes for President Biden's political appointees this week.

Johnson joined most of his Republican colleagues opposing the confirmation of former Boston Mayor Marty Walsh as next Labor secretary in the 68-29 vote.

Baldwin supported the confirmation.

President of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO Stephanie Bloomingdale slammed Johnson for his opposition, calling him an anti-worker.

“Wisconsin’s unhinged anti-worker Senator Ron Johnson delivered another slap in the face to working families with his vote against President Biden’s Secretary of Labor nominee Marty Walsh,” she said.

See the [roll call](#).

— Johnson also opposed confirming Shalanda Young as next deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Johnson voted against confirming the former U.S. House Committee on Appropriations staffer in the 63-37 vote. Baldwin supported the confirmation.

See the [roll call](#).

— Baldwin and Johnson also split on the Senate confirmation vote for Rachel Levine as next assistant secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Baldwin joined Senate Dems in the 52-48 vote confirming Levine as the first openly transgender assistant secretary of department. Johnson voted against the confirmation, along with all other Republicans except for U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who voted in favor.

See the [roll call](#).

— The two Wisconsin senators also split on confirming Vivek Murthy as the new surgeon general.

Baldwin joined Senate colleagues in the 57-43 vote in favor of confirming Murthy as

next surgeon general of the Public Health Service.

See the [roll call](#).

— But Johnson and Baldwin both voted in favor of confirming David Turk as next deputy secretary of Energy.

The two joined the majority of their colleagues in the 98-2 vote confirming the former deputy executive director of the International Energy Agency as next Deputy Secretary of Energy.

See the [roll call](#).

Posts of the week

On [#RoofingDayinDC](#), it was a pleasure to speak with [@NRCAnews](#) about advancing career and technical education programs in the roofing industry for our younger generations. pic.twitter.com/4znh2M9cE6

— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [March 24, 2021](#)

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— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [March 24, 2021](#)

<https://twitter.com/RepBryanSteil/status/1374802464873021444>

Congratulations to [@BadgerWHockey](#) on winning their SIXTH National Championship! [#OnWisconsin](#) <https://t.co/JNbu075fMS>

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [March 22, 2021](#)

Wisconsin has over 64,000 farms, spanning 14.3 million acres of the state's land, many of which are in the 7th District.

Our farms produce a range of products from cranberries to livestock and poultry, including our famous dairy farms. ☐

Happy National Agriculture Day, [#WI07!](#) <pic.twitter.com/nPFPDwPUSr>

— Rep. Tom Tiffany (@RepTiffany) [March 23, 2021](#)

To the hardworking farmers across Wisconsin who feed and fuel the world, thank you for all you do. You are the backbone of Wisconsin's rural driven economy. Happy [#NationalAgDay!](#) <pic.twitter.com/5MBf9phF9N>

— Archive: Rep. Ron Kind (@RepRonKind) [March 23, 2021](#)

I want to thank all farmers and ag workers in [#WI05](#) on this [#NationalAgDay](#). Thank you for your tireless work to supply quality food to Wisconsinites! <pic.twitter.com/GfkWnZ3Bv0>

— Rep. Scott Fitzgerald (@RepFitzgerald) [March 23, 2021](#)

ICYMI

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[Rep. Kind introduces bill to expand rural internet access](#)

[Wisconsin Congressman On Major Policy Topics, What Gets Left Behind When Young People Depart Rural Communities](#)

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[Navy's Vision for Future Fleet is Blurry Say Seapower Members Luria, Gallagher](#)

[State congressmen send letter to Evers on reclassifying deaths](#)

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