

DC Wrap: Former Wisconsin congressman joins potential third-party split from GOP

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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:

<https://forms.gle/YLYZtjWHPSt24HhZ7>

Quotes of the week

“House Democrats under Speaker Pelosi have been ruthless in advancing their radical progressive agenda, and Rep. Cheney can no longer unify the House Republican Conference in opposition to that agenda. We need to take back the House in 2022 and permanently retire Pelosi.”

– U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher on removing U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyoming, from her House Republican Conference chair position.

“The Republican Party is now anti-democratic, removed from reality, and openly embracing extremist and conspiracist fringes in league with Jan 6 Capitol insurrectionists.”

– U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, on House Republicans removing Liz Cheney from her position as chair of the House Republican Conference.

This week's news

— Former Wisconsin Congressman Reid Ribble is threatening to join a third-party split from the Republican Party.

Ribble, who formerly represented the state's 8th Congressional District, said he may join a group of about 100 current and former politicians creating a new conservative party. Members of the group say they want to depart from Republicans loyal to former President Donald Trump. The new party, which calls itself a 'rational' conservative party, is a split from the 'radical' members of the existing Republican Party.

The move comes as Republicans yesterday voted to remove U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyoming, from her post as House Republican Conference chair.

Members voted in secret, but all five of Wisconsin's Republican congressmen said they supported Cheney's ouster.

Cheney has frequently come under fire from members of her party as she has continued to rebuke many of Trump's ideals and policies.

Cheney, born in Madison, was one of only 10 House Republicans who voted in favor of impeaching Trump in January this year.

U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, told WisPolitics.com Cheney should be removed because she no longer places her job in higher regard than her personal opinions.

Members of the newly proposed party announced they would separate from Republicans if the GOP did not disavow former President Trump.

One leader of the new conservative group, Miles Taylor, says the Republican Party needs to go back to being a party that supports free minds, free markets and free people.

"The Republican Party is broken," the former Trump administration official said. "It's time for a resistance of the 'rationals' against the 'radicals.'"

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, said his ideal House would have a Republican Party full of people like Ribble because he is a conservative who can negotiate to get things done in Congress.

"He and I absolutely had our disagreements, but could you find a more agreeable guy that you could sit down and work out something? Of course not," Pocan said. "The current Republican Party purges people like Reid out, and that's the problem."

See more on the Wisconsin House GOP members' Cheney ouster [vote](#).

— Pocan also says his earmark request strategy aims to have the maximum number of projects to choose from after the approval process.

The Town of Vermont Dem in a virtual news conference said he submitted 30 earmark requests to make sure he has at least 10 projects to choose from after the Community Project Funding request approval process is complete. The House Appropriations Committee member said he anticipates at least some of the requests to be denied, so he added the buffer to make sure his earmark holster is full once the process is complete.

“It’s a little bit unclear exactly how this process is moving forward, hence, I wanted to cover all bases,” Pocan said.

He added he fully supports the move to bring back congressional earmarks because they allow members of Congress to zero in on specific issues in communities in their districts rather than looking at the state with a wider lens as usual.

“I think bringing this back to Congress is smart, it’s logical, it never should’ve gone away,” he said.

And he said new rules that cap total congressional earmark spending at roughly \$15 billion, among other things, mean spending is less likely to get out of control.

Republicans banned earmarks a decade ago after retaking control of the House with some criticizing the process as wasteful and ripe for corruption. After announcing they would bring back the process, Dems also announced several rules to increase transparency. That includes a cap on how many earmarks each representative can attach to bills.

Those rules also require lawmakers to make them publicly available and to attest that none of the funds would benefit themselves or their immediate families. Earmarks are also limited to local governments or non-profits.

He said his most expensive earmark request, a \$24 million plan to rebuild a UW-Madison laboratory that co-houses the USDA, would help replace a building he says is falling apart and has cockroaches.

Pocan and three other members of Wisconsin’s House delegation are requesting nearly \$150 million in earmarks since both national party caucuses agreed to bring back community project funding.

And with 30 requests totaling more than \$76 million, Pocan led the delegation in both the number of asks and total project costs.

His Dem colleague from La Crosse, U.S. Rep. Ron Kind, came in with nine requests that would cost more than \$47 million.

Rounding out the dems, U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, of Milwaukee, asked for more than \$24 million in project spending.

U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, was the only Republican from Wisconsin's House delegation to submit earmark requests, asking for two projects worth a combined \$930,000, the lowest total amount of all four Wisconsin delegates who made requests.

See more [here](#).

— Gov. Tony Evers says his priorities for coming federal COVID-19 stimulus money remain the same even though the state is now in line to receive \$700 million less than expected.

Still, he said a key piece is knowing whether the \$2.5 billion will come in two payments split equally over the next year. The state previously expected the money would be sent in a lump sum, and Evers and U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, earlier this week wrote the Treasury secretary asking for the money to be sent all at once.

“We need that money now, period,” Evers said on a call with reporters, adding there's been no response to the request. “Waiting a year, we'll have to do some prioritizing obviously.”

The state had expected to receive \$3.2 billion and Evers had broadly laid out how he wanted to use the money with \$700 million toward the state's ongoing response to the pandemic and \$2.5 billion for economic recovery. The second pot of money included \$600 million for small businesses, \$50 million for tourism and \$50 million for grants to schools.

See more [here](#).

— Dem U.S. Reps. Pocan, Gwen Moore, of Milwaukee, and Ron Kind, of La Crosse, in

a joint letter said they will fight for more federal dollars.

“We look forward to working with the Treasury Department to provide Wisconsin with the full amount of funds it was initially promised,” they said.

Read the joint [letter](#).

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson came under fire as he defended his decision not to get vaccinated.

Johnson said he is choosing not to get vaccinated because he already had COVID-19 at least once before.

“I think that probably gives me, based on what I’ve read, probably as strong immunity as someone who has been vaccinated,” Johnson said.

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan tweeted his response to Johnson’s claims.

“Your ignorance on this matter is only exceeded by your arrogance of that opinion,” Pocan tweeted at Johnson. “Get vaccinated please. We do this for your loved ones and neighbors, not to displease a cult leader.”

Johnson also criticized the push for children to be vaccinated saying “we do need to recognize that this is not a fully approved vaccine. It’s gone through phase one, appears to be very safe in the early trials, very effective, but we’re still undergoing the phase two and three.”

See the Johnson [release](#).

See the Pocan [tweet](#).

— Johnson is also defending his comments that there have been 3,000 reported deaths within 30 days of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

Johnson, who has been fact-checked on last week’s comments by some media outlets, argued he wasn’t suggesting the vaccine caused the deaths, but that there

needs to be research on what's going on.

Johnson has been at odds with critics in recent weeks over his comments on COVID-19 and the vaccine, including his push back on efforts to encourage people to get vaccinated.

See more [here](#).

— A Dane County judge declined to put on hold his ruling voiding contracts GOP legislative leaders signed with private law firms in anticipation of a redistricting lawsuit.

The attorney representing Republican lawmakers quickly signaled plans to ask an appeals court for an emergency stay to put the contracts back in place.

Judge Stephen Ehlke said allowing the contracts to proceed during the appeal on the merits of his ruling would harm taxpayers because it would result in “tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars” being spent inappropriately.

See more [here](#).

— The U.S. Senate confirmed former state Health Services Secretary Andrea Palm as deputy Health and Human Services secretary 61-37.

Wisconsin's delegation voted along party lines, with Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, opposed and Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, in favor.

Baldwin tweeted her support for Palm after the vote, saying she did a great job as Wisconsin's DHS leader.

— Dem U.S. Senate candidate Alex Lasry announced his campaign staff has voted to unionize and will be represented by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Engineers Local 494.

Lasry's campaign told WisPolitics.com two staffers voted to unionize: one who works on digital; and the other a campaign finance assistant.

Management members will not be part of the union, and employees who come on board as the campaign ramps up will be given a choice about joining due to Wisconsin's right-to-work law.

See more [here](#).

— Douglas Mullenix, a 31-year-old management consultant living in Menasha, announced he plans to challenge Glenn Grothman in the 6th CD GOP primary next year if the congressman seeks another term.

The lines of the district likely won't be known for months with the data needed to redraw the districts not expected to be released until the end of September.

Mullenix said in his announcement he has spent three years working in management consulting focused on improving financial stability for medical practices and strategic growth and branding for start-up companies.

See more [here](#).

— Our American Revival, the 527 created to promote Scott Walker's policies ahead of his brief presidential bid, has dissolved weeks after the FEC dismissed a 2015 complaint against the organization.

The group last week filed paperwork with the IRS to terminate its registration after raising nearly \$7.8 million since its creation in early 2015. Of that, \$7.3 million was raised during its first year in existence.

Walker catapulted to the front of the GOP pack in early 2015. But his operation began to falter by summer due to overspending and a series of verbal gaffes. Walker formally launched his campaign for president July 13, 2015, only to drop out of the race two months later.

See more [here](#).

— The Washington, D.C.-based Campaign Legal Center filed complaints in 2015 accusing Walker and three other Republicans looking at presidential bids of using their 527 organizations as de facto campaigns in violation of federal law.

That includes the allegation that once the four had moved toward a phase of testing the waters they should have transitioned to an organization that faced contribution limits of \$2,700 per donor each for the primary and general election. Instead, they continued to fund their activities with the 527s, which can accept unlimited donations.

A year ago, the FEC's Office of General Counsel was prepared to recommend the FEC find probable cause the group had violated federal law "by making excessive and prohibited contributions." But the FEC lacked a quorum for most of a 15-month period beginning in September 2019, and the statute of limitations ran out last year on the alleged infractions.

See more [here](#).

Posts of the week

Today I toured Jumping Jersey Dairy Farm with [@OrganicValley](#) in Reedsburg to see firsthand how [#WI](#) farmers are taking action to be part of the solution to the [#ClimateCrisis](#), because combatting climate change is necessary for the health and prosperity of our rural communities.
pic.twitter.com/oXbenbuOJR

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [May 7, 2021](#)

I always enjoy meeting with my fellow alumni from [@UWMadison](#) to discuss how we can improve higher education. Go Badgers!

pic.twitter.com/PryUMy7ymK

— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [May 12, 2021](#)

This [#NationalPoliceWeek](#) we come together to recognize the law enforcement officers who work hard every day to keep our communities safe, and honor and remember those who lost their lives in the line of duty. Their service and courage will never be forgotten.

pic.twitter.com/5VgaEvLXO9

— Archive: Rep. Ron Kind (@RepRonKind) [May 11, 2021](#)

This week is National Police Week. I'm proud to back the men and women of law enforcement and I'm grateful for their work keeping our communities safe. pic.twitter.com/AbWfMWcRSQ

— Bryan Steil (@BryanSteil) [May 11, 2021](#)

Yesterday, I offered my congratulations to Rylie Rude from Menomonee Falls High School for winning the [#WI05](#) Artistic Discovery Contest! Rylie's artwork is called "The City," and will be displayed in the U.S. Capitol. Thank you to all the students who entered. pic.twitter.com/4FrrwEwemK

— Rep. Scott Fitzgerald (@RepFitzgerald) [May 11, 2021](#)

Congratulations to Biak Hlawn! Your resilience and strength is an

inspiration. Your future is so bright!<https://t.co/itcHBg74tG>

— Rep. Gwen Moore (@RepGwenMoore) [May 11, 2021](#)

Our gratitude to law enforcement in Wisconsin and throughout the nation. We appreciate you. [#NationalPoliceWeek](#) <pic.twitter.com/vRW3MGcgCT>

— Senator Ron Johnson (@SenRonJohnson) [May 11, 2021](#)

Happy [#MagicMonday](#)! Here's a throwback to a year ago reminding us of the importance of wearing a mask, social distancing, & washing your hands to [#StopTheSpread](#). <pic.twitter.com/Wna06YDbh5>

— Rep. Mark Pocan (@RepMarkPocan) [May 10, 2021](#)

ICYMI

[Sen. Tammy Baldwin touts addressing climate change in visit to Reedsburg organic dairy farm](#)

[Wisconsin Republicans in Congress will vote to oust Liz Cheney from GOP leadership after her rebukes of Trump](#)

[Wisconsin members of Congress urge quick end to EU trade dispute to help Harley-Davidson](#)

[Ron Johnson's unscientific use of vaccine and death data](#)

[Critical funding announced for Wisconsin's older adults through the American Rescue Plan](#)

[Waterford High student to have artwork displayed in U.S. Capitol for a year](#)