

DC Wrap: House Dems praise earmark passage as Fitzgerald criticizes spending

Posted on Thursday, Aug 5, 2021

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

*"The new eviction moratorium will keep millions of Americans in their homes. But we clearly have to do more to get emergency rental assistance funds out the door."
- U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, on extending the federal eviction moratorium and increasing awareness of the availability of programs to pay rent.*

*"The CDC does not have the authority to extend this eviction moratorium. Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh said as much, and President Biden agreed. Democrats chose to disregard Rep. McHenry's responsible solution to address this problem and instead find themselves making a brazenly unconstitutional effort to compensate for their own failures."
- U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Allouez, on the CDC's decision to extend the federal eviction moratorium.*

This week's news

— Wisconsin's congressional Dems praised a package of appropriation bills headed to the Senate which they say will greatly improve the state.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, said he is proud to have drafted several appropriations for his district included in the bills that cleared the House. His biggest ask was not fully funded, but \$4 million was approved of the roughly \$24 million he requested for a project that would build a new plant breeding facility at UW-Madison.

Pocan also helped secure \$2 million for a men's homeless shelter in Madison, \$1 million for the Center for Black Excellence & Culture in Madison and \$500,000 for the Boys & Girls Club in Beloit.

"We know our districts better than probably someone sitting in a cubicle in Washington, D.C. and we wanted to make sure that we could get this voted on by Democrats and Republicans," Pocan said in a Madison press conference this week.

However, the only Wisconsin Republican in the House to request earmark project funding approval, U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, criticized the package's high price tags.

"These spending measures show just how out of touch Democrats are with everyday Americans," Fitzgerald said. "Inflation is skyrocketing thanks to President Biden's unprecedented spending, and these proposals will only hook taxpayers with higher bills."

Fitzgerald also slammed Dems for removing the Hyde Amendment, which bars federal money from funding abortions, and the Weldon Amendment, which blocks agencies receiving federal funding from discriminating against entities for refusing to provide or pay for abortions.

He also criticized the package for weakening immigration laws and failing to fund paychecks for armed forces and border patrol employees.

Fitzgerald's office did not respond to requests for comment on whether his two earmark requests were included in the package.

U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, said she is proud the legislation includes some key priorities she fought for.

Moore praised the appropriations package for increasing the program's funding by \$200 million. The package also provides \$6 billion in WIC funding Moore supported and \$12 million for school breakfast expansion grants, including her amendment to

provide an additional \$2 million.

A bill that would increase CDC program funding by \$11 million and HUD funding by \$100 million includes language Moore requested that urges more of those funds go directly to cities like Milwaukee. Moore said the measure supports “efforts to protect our children from lead paint.”

The package would also start funding programs authorized under a law Moore helped pass last year. Moore said the measure will help prevent traumatic, unexpected and unexplained death of infants and children.

U.S. Rep. Ron Kind in a statement also lauded the package’s progress in Congress.

“We need to make sure our economy works for everyone, especially hard-working families here in Wisconsin,” the La Crosse Dem said. “I’ll continue working to find common ground to promote fiscal responsibility while making smart investments that keep our economy growing and America the most innovative country in the world.”

Kind’s office did not provide a list of his earmark proposals that made it into the final package.

— The Senate passed appropriations legislation that included projects supported by U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin.

The bill includes \$39.7 million for upgrades to a UW-Madison agricultural facility, \$5 million for Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College student housing development and \$4 million for a Memorial Hospital of Lafayette County replacement facility.

See the full list [here](#).

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson touted his amendment to the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure spending bill that would help complete the border wall.

The amendment, blocked in a 48-49 vote with one Dem in favor, would have prohibited cancelling any contracts for physical barriers or other border security

measures that are already funded. The measure also would have banned government funds from being used to pay for penalties incurred by violating those contracts. Johnson said the wall is the most important piece of infrastructure he can think of.

“Please, let’s recognize fences work — and certainly Congress recognized it when we put a double layer around the people’s house for a number of months, spent hundreds of millions of dollars on that security effort — so let’s not waste the taxpayers’ money. Let’s recognize walls work,” the Oshkosh Republican said.

He also slammed Vice President Harris, put in charge of handling the southern border crisis, for not recognizing the source of the problem.

“Vice President Harris went down to Central America looking for the root cause of this crisis,” he said. “She only would have had to walk into the Oval Office and look at President Biden, because President Biden is the root cause of this crisis. It’s his policies: the dismantling of successful policies from the previous administration that had stemmed the flow, that had largely secured our border until this president took office and reversed all that progress.”

Johnson added the measure would complete the remaining 285 miles of fencing along the southern border with Mexico and help combat drug trafficking.

See the [release](#).

— U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothman was among nearly five dozen House Republicans who urged a federal court to reject the Department of Justice’s challenge of a Georgia law to overhaul election policies.

The Glenbeulah Republican was the only member of the state delegation to sign on to the proposed brief, which was filed by the conservative American Center for Law and Justice.

The proposed brief backs Georgia’s move to have the case dismissed. Among other things, it argues that allegations that some voters may experience “minor inconveniences and unremarkable burdens” aren’t enough to override Georgia’s interest in preventing voter fraud.

See the [motion](#).

Read the [brief](#).

— U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil told 1st CD constituents he is vaccinated against COVID-19 and that he believes the immunization protects against death and serious illness.

“The proof is in the numbers of people who get seriously ill,” Steil said during a listening session at Janesville City Hall. “The number of people who die from the disease plummets when you take vaccine, but there should not be a federal government mandate.”

Steil added that people who have questions about COVID-19 vaccines should consult their doctors.

Watch the listening session [here](#).

— U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany penned an op-ed criticizing the CDC for issuing new guidance that vaccinated people wear masks indoors amid new outbreaks.

Tiffany called policies like mask mandates “largely ineffective,” encouraging his constituents to “demand transparency from their local officials and ask tough questions about the data they are relying on to back up their public policy choices.” He also called for an investigation into whether the COVID-19 virus originated from experiments in a Wuhan lab.

Read the op-ed [here](#).

— Gov. Tony Evers says \$10 million in federal funding will be allocated to local tourism efforts.

The funding comes from the American Rescue Plan Act and will be awarded by the

state Department of Administration. Grants up to \$3.5 million will be awarded to local governments and nonprofits promoting tourism for specific projects aimed at boosting the industry.

“Wisconsin’s tourism industry was one of the hardest hit throughout the coronavirus pandemic, but these folks are innovative, dedicated, and resilient, and we’re working to make sure our tourism industry can bounce back from this pandemic,” Evers said in a statement.

See more [here](#).

— Wisconsin is expected to see \$5.2 billion to be used for federal highway repair if the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package awaiting a vote in the Senate passes.

According to a White House fact sheet, commute times for Wisconsinites have increased by 2.8 percent and the state received a ‘C’ grade on its infrastructure report card. Commuters who take public transit spend an extra 62.7 percent of time commuting, Black people are 5.9 times more likely to use public transportation and 29% of trains and other transit vehicles are past useful life according to the same report.

To address those issues, in addition to the \$5.2 billion for highways, Wisconsin would see:

- *\$595 million over five years to improve public transportation options;
- *\$100 million to help provide broadband coverage; and

The infrastructure bill also includes \$79 million over five years to support the expansion of an EV charging network to help combat climate change and support domestic jobs.

The state would also see \$1 million per year over the next five years for environmental work as part of the U.S. Senate’s \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package.

The money is part of an Environmental Protection Agency allocation that would send \$60 million to 12 states in the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force. Each state would see \$1 million per year from next year

through 2026.

Three percent of the funds are slated for salaries, expenses and administration of the environmental work.

See the 2,702-page [bill text](#) (EPA allocation on page 2579).

— Chris Larson said he dropped his bid for the U.S. Senate because the crowded Dem primary field made it difficult to break through and he wasn't willing to go after his friend Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes.

Speaking with reporters after a Capitol news conference, the Milwaukee Dem said he will seek reelection to his state Senate seat in 2022.

He also said Barnes, endorsed by Larson, lines up with him ideologically.

"I just didn't have the heart of trying to go out there and try and make him a villain when we're friends, and I think he'd be a great U.S. senator," Larson said.

See more [here](#).

— Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes led his party rivals for U.S. Senate among Dem primary voters in Milwaukee County, according to a new poll commissioned by Milwaukee Works Inc.

But 29 percent of those surveyed said they were undecided as to which candidate to back in the crowded August 2022 primary field.

Thirty-nine percent of respondents said they backed Barnes, the former Milwaukee lawmaker who got into the race last month. State Sen. Chris Larson, D-Milwaukee, was backed by 15 percent. They were the only two to crack double digits of the eight candidates listed in the poll.

See more [here](#).

— Americans are split on increasing the number of justices on the U.S. Supreme Court, according to a new national Marquette University Law School Poll.

Some Dems have pushed the idea of expanding the court beyond the current configuration of nine justices after Republicans shortly before the November election confirmed Donald Trump's nomination of Amy Coney Barrett.

The new poll found 48 percent of American adults favor increasing the number of justices, while 51 percent were opposed.

See more [here](#).

— Approval for the court has dropped 6 points since the September poll, when 66 percent overall approved of its performance.

Much of that decline is due to fewer Republicans approving of the court even as the conservative majority increased.

The September 2020 poll, taken before liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, found 80 percent of Republicans approved of the court's performance, while 19 percent disapproved.

Even with Comey joining the bench and an expanded conservative majority at 6-3, only 57 percent of Republicans in the latest poll approved of the court's performance. For Dems, it was 59 percent, largely unchanged from 57 percent in September.

See more [here](#).

— Former DNC Chair Tom Perez will be in Milwaukee on Friday to fundraise for his Maryland gubernatorial bid, according to a copy of the invite obtained by WisPolitics.com.

Those who donate or raise \$3,000 qualify as hosts, while those who contribute or raise \$1,000 are co-hosts. Both get a private reception with Perez.

Donations start at \$100, and the host committee includes: Megan Holbrook, a digital strategist; John W. Miller, a venture capitalist and UW System regent; Dem fundraiser Patrick Guarasci; Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett; Chuck Pruitt, who co-owns a fundraising and direct mail company; and Dem operative Teresa Vilmain.

See more [here](#).

— Meanwhile, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, often mentioned as a possible candidate for president in 2024, was in Milwaukee last week to raise money for his 2022 reelection bid.

Those who donated \$25,000 per couple to the GOP incumbent qualified as hosts, according to a copy of the invite. Donations started at \$2,000 per couple to attend.

The invite didn't list any local hosts and said the address for the fundraiser would be provided upon RSVP.

See more [here](#).

— The BlueGreen Alliance has launched a five-figure campaign targeting voters in Wisconsin and other swing states with Facebook and Instagram ads.

The "For America, By America" campaign urging Congress to invest in manufacturing and infrastructure will also reach voters in Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

"We hope by running these ads that more workers and communities speak up and join us in the call to deliver a generational manufacturing and infrastructure package that supports working people and protects the environment for years to come," BlueGreen Alliance Executive Director Jason Walsh said.

Post of the week

<https://twitter.com/repmarkpocan/status/1422926340819496967>

<https://twitter.com/RepBryanSteil/status/1422969854622113795>

<https://twitter.com/RepGwenMoore/status/1422965855193796620>

<https://twitter.com/RepGrothman/status/1421834853801107470>

<https://twitter.com/SenatorBaldwin/status/1422975350569639936>

<https://twitter.com/SenRonJohnson/status/1421999111130259459>

ICYMI

[Kind, Wenstrup introduce Charitable Equity for Veterans Act](#)

[Senator Tammy Baldwin weighs in on infrastructure spending in Wisconsin](#)

[Wisconsin congressional Republicans want state unemployment audit](#)

[Ron Johnson criticizes new CDC guidance, questions effectiveness of masks despite research showing they reduce COVID spread](#)