

WisDems: Multimillionaire U.S. Sen. Johnson paid a mere \$2,105 in state income taxes in 2017, despite making big bucks

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Madison, Wis. — Despite making millions of dollars in 2017, Senator Ron Johnson paid virtually nothing in state income taxes — and won't tell Wisconsiners why. See more below on how Johnson avoided paying his fair share of taxes in 2017:

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: [Multimillionaire U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson paid a mere \\$2,105 in state income taxes in 2017, despite making big bucks](#)

U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson has pushed back on any suggestion that wealthy individuals, such as himself, should be paying more in income taxes.

"People should be paying their fair share," Johnson said recently on WISN-AM (1130). "But when you have the top 1% of taxpayers paying 40% of the income tax, I mean, at some point in time, you got to go, 'Well, that's got to be pretty close to their fair share, huh?'"

Good question.

But here's a better one:

How did a multimillionaire like Johnson, who makes \$174,000 a year as a U.S. senator, pay only a couple of thousand dollars in state income taxes just a few years back?

To be exact, state records say Johnson, an Oshkosh Republican, paid Wisconsin a

total of \$2,105 in state income taxes for 2017.

For context, a married Wisconsin couple who jointly reported a taxable income of \$40,000 — that is, their adjusted gross income minus all deductions and credits — would have had a 2017 state income tax bill of \$2,107, two dollars more than what Johnson paid.

The state had a graduated tax rate of 4% to 7.65% in 2017.

Now consider this: In his federal financial filings, Johnson reported personal income ranging from \$276,412 to \$2.2 million in 2017 — on top of his Senate salary. That means he had a minimum income of \$450,000 in the same year that he paid \$2,105 in state income taxes.

And this: Johnson has averaged paying a little more than \$60,000 a year in state income taxes to Wisconsin over the past decade — 30 times what he paid in 2017.

So why the big tax break four years ago?

A special one-year deduction? Business losses? Large charitable contributions? Or a tax break as a result of former President Donald Trump's 2017 tax bill?

Johnson's staff isn't saying.

"The senator had a smaller tax payment because he had less income to report in 2017," said Vanessa Ambrosini, a spokeswoman for Johnson.

Asked if the second-term senator would release his federal tax returns to provide some further context, Ambrosini said no.

"The senator will not be providing media with his tax returns," she said.

If Johnson decides to run for a third term, which is an open question, Ambrosini said he will provide the press with a similar level of "tax detail" as he has in the past.

It's not clear what that means. In the 2010 race, Johnson released three years of federal tax returns; he provided no returns in 2016.

"He had complied with all Senate financial disclosure requirements," Ambrosini said.

And what do those show?

His most recent report, filed in May, says Johnson had assets worth between \$16.5 million and \$78.1 million at the end of last year.

A big chunk of that — between \$5 million and \$25 million — came from the March 2020 sale of his share of Pacur LLC, an Oshkosh-based supplier of specialty plastic packaging materials. Johnson headed the privately held company before he was elected to the Senate in 2010.

All of which is very interesting financial information on Johnson, who — you may recall — delayed and then voted against the \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill earlier this year that included \$1,400 stimulus checks and monthly child tax-credit payments for many Americans.

But those Senate records do not explain why he paid such a paltry sum to Wisconsin in 2017.

“Wisconsinites deserve to know what Sen. Johnson is hiding in his financial records,” said Philip Shulman, a spokesman for the state Democratic Party.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel turned up his past tax payments by asking the state Department of Revenue for the state income taxes paid over the past 10 years by Johnson and all the major Democratic candidates in the 2022 race for Johnson’s seat.

[...]

In 2011, Johnson’s plastics firm paid him \$10 million in deferred compensation shortly after Johnson poured \$9 million into his campaign to defeat then-U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold.

More recently, Pro Publica reported that Johnson fought to sweeten the tax break for companies known as pass-throughs — so-called because profits are passed through to owners — in Trump’s 2017 tax bill, a move that benefited some of his biggest donors. Among the beneficiaries were Dick and Liz Uihlein of Pleasant Prairie-based packaging company Uline and Diane Hendricks of ABC Supply in Beloit.

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