

# Bill Kaplan: Congressional Democrats pass climate change-health bill

Posted on Monday, Aug 15, 2022

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Congressional Democrats, including all Wisconsin Democratic members of Congress, stepped up to the plate and hit a home run, the Inflation Reduction Act. This historic legislation tackles climate change, lowers drug costs, reduces Affordable Care Act private insurance premiums, cuts the deficit and requires big corporations, earning more than \$1 billion per year in profits, to pay their fair share of taxes.

Congressional Republicans, including all Wisconsin GOP members of Congress, were apocalyptic that West Virginia Democratic Senator Joe Manchin and Majority Leader Chuck Schumer had reached agreement on the Inflation Reduction Act. Angry GOP House leaders asked their members to oppose the Senate-passed bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act. All Wisconsin GOP representatives obliged and opposed the job creating bill out of spite. It passed despite the tantrum. Then 25 GOP senators, including Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson, who had voted for a veterans disability and health bill (the PACT Act), reneged and blocked final passage. A public backlash forced the GOP senators to retreat.

Despite political games the Democratic-led Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act with no GOP support. Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin summed up the bill: "Wisconsin working families need lower costs ... . Our reforms will close tax loopholes for big, billion-dollar corporations and make them pay a fairer share of taxes so we can cut the deficit and lower the out-of-pocket costs for working families on prescription drugs and health care premiums. Our legislation will lower energy costs for consumers, and will make investments to boost the production of Made in America clean energy that will create jobs and take on the climate crisis."

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A bipartisan group of five former Treasury Secretaries backed Baldwin up: “And the extra taxes levied on corporations do not reflect increases in the corporate tax rate, but rather the reclaiming of revenue lost to tax avoidance and provisions benefitting the most affluent. ... This legislation will help increase American competitiveness, address our climate crisis, lower costs for families, and fight inflation ... .”

However, Senator Ron Johnson denied the reality of climate change and instead took the side of big corporations and drug companies. His press release sought to frighten Wisconsinites by raising the specter of an overzealous IRS: “This bill will not only raise the burden Americans will bear from business tax increases but it will also supercharge the IRS to go after American families ... .” Fear mongering, lies.

IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig, appointed by Trump, welcomed the Inflation Reduction Act’s funding for the IRS to increase staffing, down sharply since 2010, and purchase new technology to go after corporate and wealthy tax cheats. Rettig said: “These resources are absolutely not about increasing audit scrutiny on small businesses or middle-income Americans.” Rettig wants to crack down on tax avoidance by abuse of pass-through deductions benefitting the super-rich. In 2017, Johnson pushed for increasing this tax break which benefitted some of his wealthy donors by at least \$215 million.

Johnson is scared of voters finding out who he really represents.

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