Bill Kaplan: Johnson deceptive on economic security

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On October 6, 2016 Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson, then running for reelection, told the Baraboo News Republic that if he won he would not run again in 2022. That was a lie. However, Johnson told an even bigger whopper in that same interview. He claimed to be running on security: “It’s not just about homeland and national security. It’s job security, it’s income security, it’s retirement security, it’s healthcare security.” But Johnson, a self-described follower of conservative writer Ayn Rand, is disdainful of government intervention to help middle-working class Wisconsinites.

When Oshkosh Defense won a contract to manufacture U.S. postal delivery vehicles, it moved the jobs to low-wage South Carolina. Regular folks in Wisconsin, hoping for good-paying union jobs with benefits, lost. Johnson, unlike Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin, did not lift a finger to keep those jobs in Wisconsin. Heartlessly, Johnson said: “It’s not like we don’t have enough jobs in Wisconsin.”

His record’s worse on “retirement security.” Johnson voted no on saving the hard-earned pensions of over 1 million, including about 22,500 Wisconsinites. Instead, it was Baldwin who helped lead this effort to provide for “retirement security” for Wisconsin workers and retirees. Johnson could care less. In contrast, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the legislative fix was “better than nothing, and nothing was where we were headed.”

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Moreover, Johnson has been trying to undermine Social Security, including

Medicare. The architects of the Social Security Act and its implementation were UW-Madison scholars. Today, 18 percent of Wisconsin is 65 or older. 1,275,932 Wisconsinites receive Social Security retirement, disability and survivor benefits, and 1,200,527 Wisconsinites are enrolled in Medicare. These beloved federal programs have sharply reduced poverty and brought economic and health security for many seniors and families. But a cold-hearted Johnson casts aspersions on Social Security and Medicare.

In 2016, he slandered Social Security as a “legal Ponzi scheme.” Johnson also said he would “take a look” at privatization. Now he advocates politicizing Social Security and Medicare by transforming them from mandatory guaranteed programs into “discretionary spending.” Bet on resultant partisan infighting, budget paralysis and government shutdowns. Good-bye Social Security checks and Medicare coverage.

Johnson engages in scare tactics to undermine popular support for Social Security and Medicare. There will be future funding shortfalls because of advances in medical care and an aging population. But neither program is going broke. Shortfalls in funding can be addressed by “increasing Social Security’s tax revenues” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities). For example, tax all wage and investment income.

Finally, Johnson wants to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and has repeatedly voted to do so. The ACA provides affordable quality private health insurance coverage for 14.5 million Americans, including over 200,000 Wisconsinites. It also expanded Medicaid coverage for millions of Americans, including kids, the disabled, elderly and low-income individuals (many of whom are working). He has no alternative plan.

For God’s sakes, don’t let Johnson’s deceptions fool or scare you into voting for him. He could care less about us.

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