

Bill Kaplan: U.S. Senator Ron Johnson is his own worst opponent

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Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson told the state GOP convention: “I have an opponent. Probably the worst opponent anyone could have. I have the media against me.” Right out of Trump’s campaign playbook. Despite his 2016 pledge not to run in 2022, the two-term senator is seeking a third term. He flat-out lied to the voters of Wisconsin. Incredibly, Johnson told conservative talk show host Lisa Boothe that he has not been “particularly successful” as a senator (Hill). Clearly, Senator Johnson is his own worst opponent.

Johnson actually craves press interviews. He is a ubiquitous presence on TV and radio. Johnson can’t keep quiet in front of a camera or a microphone. The limelight has become addictive. However, Johnson’s legislative accomplishments have been slim to none. From the time he was elected, millionaire Johnson has been obsessed with cutting taxes for the wealthy and defunding the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Johnson’s first Senate speech raised dark questions about the 16th Amendment (allowed federal income taxes). He thinks “the power to tax income” put America on the road to ruin. However, IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig (appointed by Trump) pointed out that tax cheats are making out like bandits: \$1 trillion in unpaid taxes yearly and growing abuses from cryptocurrency, income earned abroad and pass-through deductions (NYT).

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Johnson’s singular legislative accomplishment was to make Trump’s tax cuts more tilted to the wealthy by adding a 20 percent deduction for pass-through businesses,

like his own. Johnson's tax break is not primarily for "small businesses" and "Main Street" as claimed. ProPublica reported: "Treasury economists found that the top 1% of Americans by income have reaped nearly 60% of the billions in tax savings created by (Johnson's) provision. And most of that amount went to the top 0.1%. That's because even though there are many small pass-through businesses, most of the pass-through profits ... flow to the wealthy owners of a limited group of large companies."

ProPublica also pointed out that Johnson campaign donors Dick and Liz Uihlein as well as Diane Hendricks could get "more than half a billion in tax savings ... over (the) eight-year life" of the pass-through deduction. These tycoons have not forgotten Johnson's largess: "Billionaires Diane Hendricks and Uihleins pump \$3.5 million into new group backing U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson" (MJS). However, Johnson has no shame: "Now, did my business benefit? Sure. Did some of my donor businesses? Sure. When you give tax relief to everybody, everybody benefits" (if you are in the top 0.1%).

Johnson's lobbying for himself and other tycoons extends to his obsession to repeal the ACA. He is fanatically opposed to ACA taxes on the wealthy which helped extend ACA private insurance coverage to 14.5 million, including over 212,000 Wisconsinites and nearly 19 million through Medicaid expansion. The taxes apply to earnings over \$250,000 - couples and \$200,000 - individuals, as well as taxes on capital gains, dividends and other investment income.

All of Johnson's press antics have not made life better for hard-working Wisconsinites.

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