

DC Wrap: Johnson switches to in favor of a bill that would provide more health care for veterans exposed to toxic chemicals

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Welcome to our weekly DC Wrap, where we write about Wisconsin's congressional delegation. Sign up here to receive the newsletter directly:

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Quotes of the week

"The Biden administration and Democrats have played politics with this bill, it could have passed last week had Leader Schumer simply done what he did today — allow amendment votes."

- U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, defending his votes for, then against, then for a bill that expands health care for veterans exposed to toxic chemicals. See more on the bill below.

"You can never trust @SenRonJohnson. He plays games by supporting things and then opposing, playing semantical games and in general, representing the most extreme elements of his party as well as the wealthy and special interests. Never trust @SenRonJohnson."

- U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, in a [tweet](#) blasting Johnson for changing positions.

This week's news

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, who joined fellow Republicans last week in blocking a final vote to expand benefits for veterans exposed to toxic burn pits during their service, backed it on final passage.

The Republicans who opposed cloture on the PACT Act last week sought votes on amendments they argued would hold down costs. But they faced intense blowback

from veterans and activists.

Senate leaders struck a deal that allowed for votes on amendments, though all three failed because they didn't meet the required 60-vote threshold. The bill then passed 86-11, clearing the way for President Biden to sign it.

Johnson, R-Oshkosh, sought to blame Dems for the delay.

"It's unfortunate that some chose to exploit this issue for political points with misleading rhetoric," Johnson said. "I unequivocally support providing coverage to service members affected by toxic burn pit exposure, and have been consistent in my votes throughout this process."

Baldwin bemoaned what she called "obstruction" from Republicans.

"The Senate voted to #PassThePACTAct and keep our promise to America's veterans," Baldwin tweeted yesterday. "I supported this legislation from the beginning and we have overcome obstruction from Senate Republicans to finally provide our veterans with the health care they have earned serving our country."

[See Johnson's statement.](#)

[See Baldwin's tweet.](#)

— The two senators also voted in favor of accepting Russia-bordering nations Finland and Sweden into NATO.

In a 95-1 vote Johnson and Baldwin joined the majority against U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., in favor of a resolution supporting the northern European nations' possible acceptance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Johnson, ranking member of Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, in a statement applauded the move.

"Finland and Sweden will complement NATO's collective defense and send a clear message to the Russian regime that their unprovoked atrocities in Ukraine, attempts to divide the West, and other malign activities have backfired," he said.

Baldwin in a tweet touted her meetings last month with U.S. ambassadors to both countries.

“I stand with our European allies and fully support both Finland and Sweden joining and strengthening the #NATO alliance,” she said.

[See Johnson’s statement.](#)

[See Baldwin’s tweet.](#)

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson is now saying he may vote against a bill to codify the right to same-sex marriage after saying he had no reason to oppose it.

The Oshkosh Republican told Axios yesterday he never said he would support the Respect for Marriage Act this week after last week saying he didn’t see a reason to oppose it.

“I’ve never said I would support it,” he said this week. “I said I didn’t see a reason to oppose it.”

— Johnson also yesterday said Medicare and Social Security should be switched from required to discretionary spending so Congress has oversight over the funds.

The Oshkosh Republican in an interview on “The Regular Joe Show” podcast said he wants members of Congress to be able to control that spending so they can have some oversight on how much debt the nation incurs. Switching the programs to discretionary spending would put them before Congress for approval every year.

“Our problem in this country is that more than 70 percent of our federal budget, of our federal spending, is all mandatory spending. It’s on automatic pilot. It never — you just don’t do proper oversight. You don’t get in there and fix the programs going bankrupt. It’s just on automatic pilot,” he said.

— All 10 of Wisconsin’s congressional members are backing a resolution to remember the 10th anniversary of the Oak Creek Sikh Temple mass shooting and honor the seven who died.

They introduced a measure to recognize first responders who provided aid after a white supremacist opened fire inside the place of worship on Aug. 5, 2012. The man killed six worshipers that day and wounded four others. Another died of their wounds in 2020.

U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Janesville, introduced a companion resolution alongside all Wisconsin House members.

“This senseless act of violence should have never occurred. Nonetheless, the Oak Creek community has come together to always remember and honor the victims of this tragedy,” Steil said. “I join the Oak Creek community in remembering the victims and thank each of my colleagues for supporting my resolution to honor the horrific attack in Oak Creek ten years ago.”

[See the Senate resolution.](#)

[See the House resolution.](#)

— U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothman this week introduced a bill to stop officials from canceling or forgiving student loans.

The Fairness for Responsible Borrowers Act would prevent the Secretary of Education, Secretary of the Treasury and Attorney General from doing so. The only exception would be for federal forgiveness, repayment or cancellation programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965.

The Glenbeulah Republican in a statement said forgiving student loans would only make inflation worse.

“The President’s insistence on forgiving loans is a troubling sign that he is ready to once again abuse his power to score political points,” Grothman said. “Broad student loan forgiveness is particularly insulting to Americans who paid their loans or never attended college, and they deserve an explanation.”

[See the release.](#)

Posts of the week

Last month I met with our US Ambassador to Finland and this week I met with Sweden's Ambassador to the US to discuss the upcoming [#NATO](#) vote in Congress. I stand with our European allies and fully support both Finland and Sweden joining and strengthening the [#NATO](#) alliance.

pic.twitter.com/xV834yweuN

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [August 3, 2022](#)

Great to join Racine's National Night Out and see the community and police come together. It sends a message that crime and lawlessness have no place in our communities. pic.twitter.com/kEhFpnc6jD

— Bryan Steil (@RepBryanSteil) [August 3, 2022](#)

It was a privilege to join Hayden Fitzpatrick for his Eagle Scout Court of Honor in [#Cedarburg](#). Congratulations on your achievement!
pic.twitter.com/nNaLzxrOWM

— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [July 31, 2022](#)

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