

DC Wrap: Kind blasts Trump for calling Putin “genius”; Congress focuses on Ukraine

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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

“President Biden sent a powerful message to the world tonight that the United States and our allies continue to stand with the Ukrainian people against Putin’s unprovoked attack. In times like these, it’s clear there’s far more that unites us as Americans rather than divides us as we join together in strong support of Ukraine and democracy everywhere.

-U.S. Rep. Ron Kind, D-La Crosse, praising Biden’s State of the Union speech.

If the President is going to right the ship, he needs a course correction. The obvious way to start is by ending his administration’s war on American energy, cutting off America’s imports of Russian oil, and reinstating the Keystone Pipeline and the thousands of good-paying Wisconsin jobs that come with it.

-U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Allouez, criticizing Biden for doubling down on what he called “radical policies that created these crises and left Americans worse off.”

This week’s news

— U.S. Rep. Ron Kind told WisPolitics.com that former President Trump’s praising of Russian President Putin’s invasion as “genius” and “wonderful” was shocking and called out 3rd CD candidate Derrick Van Orden for attending an event where Trump praised Putin.

“It’s shocking to hear a former U.S. president call Putin’s decision to violate Ukraine’s sovereignty ‘genius’ and ‘wonderful,’” he said. “It’s also shocking that Derrick Van Orden was apparently alongside Trump at Mar-a-Lago recently as he

praised Putin yet again.”

Van Orden is running for Kind’s congressional seat and also ran unsuccessfully for the seat in 2020. Kind does not plan to run for reelection this year. Van Orden called Putin’s invasion a “flagrant violation of international law” in a statement last week.

Kind said Trump’s remarks fueled the fire as he saw Russian media running with Trump’s remarks while in London last week to talk about sanctioning Russia.

“I saw how the Russian media was endlessly running Trump’s comments applauding Putin. It was embarrassing and un-American. The free world is united in our support for Ukraine and we must continue to hold Putin accountable,” Kind said.

— Kind also spoke in a virtual press conference on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and said he expects Putin to continue military efforts. But Kind said his actions would not go unpunished.

Referencing the death of former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević in prison while awaiting trial for crimes committed during the Yugoslav Wars, the La Crosse Dem said: “If Vladimir Putin wants to suffer the same fate, he can continue doing what he’s doing today.”

Last week, Kind met with UK government officials and members of the British Parliament in London to discuss a coordinated sanction response to Putin’s invasion. Kind said his area of focus was high-tech export controls.

“As we know, the world runs on microchips today — the Russian army runs on microchips today. And I’m convinced this is going to have a very real impact on the Russian economy, and especially Russia’s military capability — but not overnight,” Kind said.

Kind announced that the Committee on Ways and Means, of which he is a member, is working on a resolution to revoke Russia’s most-favored-nation status and potentially remove the country from the World Trade Organization.

Kind praised NATO, the UK and European allies for their unity and President Biden for his “strong leadership.” He also praised the Ukrainian people for their resilience and bravery. Kind said Putin has miscalculated and probably wasn’t anticipating the level of resistance in Ukraine and around the world.

“I think he was expecting a divided Ukraine, a divided Europe, a divided NATO and a divided United States. And instead, he’s getting just the opposite: an unprecedented show of unity, to stand up against the worst military aggression that the world has seen since the Second World War,” Kind said.

Kind also spoke to the disruption in oil supply and said Americans should expect an increase in energy prices, at least in the short term. Kind said that his Republican colleagues’ suggestions to ramp up domestic oil production are not the way to go.

“That doubles down on a failed strategy that keeps us dependent on countries like Russia and Saudi Arabia, and throughout the Middle East,” Kind said.

— U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil is among those who have pushed for an increase in domestic oil production to reduce dependence on Russia.

“We need an all-of-the-above approach to energy. In particular, we need to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, which we can do by producing oil and gas here in North America,” the Janesville Republican told WisPolitics.com.

Kind said that the U.S. should focus more on building a sustainable energy economy.

U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany this week criticized the Biden administration for living a “green fantasy,” which he said in a tweet has “killed American jobs, caused energy prices to skyrocket, and funded Putin’s war machine.”

Kind responded to fellow delegate Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Green Bay, calling for an emergency session of Congress to support Ukraine.

Kind said he wasn’t sure what Gallagher was trying to accomplish and that Congress has already pivoted in light of the invasion and will continue working with allies.

“I can assure you those conversations are taking place right now,” Kind said.

— U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin has joined a letter asking Biden to extend temporary protected status to Ukrainians in the U.S.

In the letter, senators say granting temporary protected status to Ukrainians would not pose a security risk as non-citizens are ineligible if they have a criminal

background or pose a threat to national security.

They also said only a limited number of Ukrainians – students, business travelers, and tourists — will be eligible, and they cannot safely return to their home country. They cited reports from Ukrainian officials that at least 353 civilians have been killed since the invasion began.

“Forcing Ukrainians to return to Ukraine in the midst of a war would be inconsistent with America’s values and our national security interests,” they said.

[See the letter.](#)

— Wisconsin House members also unanimously signed onto a resolution declaring support for Ukrainian sovereignty.

The House in a 426-3 vote approved the measure, which signifies the chamber “stands steadfastly, staunchly, proudly, and fervently behind the Ukrainian people in their fight against the authoritarian Putin regime.”

The measure also calls for the U.S. and its allies to deliver defense aid to Ukraine in order to help combat Russian armored, airborne and other threats.

[See the roll call.](#)

— Fresh off his State of the Union address, Biden used a visit to an aging bridge in Superior as an example of projects that will be funded through the new bipartisan infrastructure law.

Biden during yesterday’s visit said the John A. Blatnik Memorial Bridge in Superior is in trouble “for the same reasons” a bridge in Pittsburgh collapsed just hours before the president’s January visit there to discuss infrastructure.

The 1.5-mile bridge is one of two bridges connecting the city to Duluth, Minn. The bridge has an outdated design and has deteriorated since it opened 61 years ago, Biden said.

“The bridge is 61 years old and at the end of its useful life, the corrosion over the years has lowered the weight it can sustain and safely handle,” Biden said.

The infrastructure law invests \$110 billion in roads, bridges and major projects, with

\$5.4 billion funneled toward Wisconsin highways and bridges. Funds will be used under the bipartisan infrastructure law to modernize the bridge.

Gordon Smith, vice president of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades Local 106, praised Biden for investing in infrastructure.

“For many years, those of us in the building and construction trades have heard the promise of massive infrastructure investment, but those promises were never kept,” Smith said. “President Joe Biden and his team have finally delivered on that promise.”

Biden also highlighted components of the law to replace lead pipes and expand internet access.

“The days of having to pull your child up outside of McDonald’s to do their homework because there’s no internet in your home and no internet in your region end when we provide affordable, high-speed internet to every American; urban, rural, suburban, tribal,” Biden said.

The president was accompanied by First Lady Jill Biden, Gov. Tony Evers, first lady Kathy Evers, U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, and U.S. Reps. Ron Kind and Mark Pocan. Pocan made the trip though his mother, Corinne, passed away last night at 93 years old.

This was Biden’s third trip to Wisconsin as president. His first official visit was for a CNN town hall in Milwaukee on Feb. 16, 2021, and the second was to La Crosse on June 29.

[Watch video of Biden’s address.](#)

— According to a White House press pool report, several dozen Trump supporters were grouped together at the UW-Superior campus entrance with Trump and “f*ck Joe Biden” flags before Biden spoke.

The League of Conservation Voters launched a digital ad in Superior and the surrounding areas calling to “finish the job” on the climate investments in Build Back Better. A spokesman said the group spent less than \$10,000 on the spot and is looking to add to it in other Wisconsin markets in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee placed digital ads on

the Superior Telegram's website knocking U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, for refusing to "fix Wisconsin roads and bridges."

[See the Conservation Voters ad here.](#)

— GOP U.S. Reps. Steil and Tiffany blasted Biden for touting his Build Back Better plan instead of working to stop rising gas prices, violent crime and other issues.

Tiffany, of Minocqua, and GOP colleague U.S. Rep. Pete Stauber, of Minn., in a joint press release said they support funding the Great Lakes and the Twin Ports of Superior and Duluth, but added the infrastructure package is a "Trojan Horse for the Democrats' big-spending socialist agenda."

Stauber and Tiffany called out the president for high inflation and for canceling federal leases with Twin Metals. The leases would give the company access to minerals to build an underground mine that environmental advocates argued would put the Boundary Waters at risk.

"It is insulting that President Biden is visiting the very region in which he recently killed the prospect of thousands of good paying union jobs through his cancellation of the Twin Metals Leases," they said.

The GOP Reps said Biden should "create jobs, not kill them."

Steil in a statement before Biden's remarks said that the president should be addressing violent crime, inflation, the southern border, "global instability" and domestic energy instead of touting a bill that passed last year.

"Considering our ever rising gas and home heating costs, it's unfortunate that President Biden did not take this opportunity to focus on domestic energy infrastructure," the Janesville Republican said.

[See the Tiffany release.](#)

[See the Steil release.](#)

— Wisconsin's U.S. senators and representatives are reacting after former Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman presented his report on the 2020 election to the Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee Tuesday.

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin blasted Gableman on Twitter after he asked the state Legislature to “take a hard look” at decertifying the state’s electoral votes for Joe Biden — something the Legislature’s non-partisan attorneys have said isn’t possible.

“Mike Gableman has undermined faith in our elections promoting Trump’s Big Lie, fleeing taxpayers, and suggesting the 2020 election should be overturned,” the Madison Dem said. “He can’t handle the truth Biden won a free, fair and secure election. Trump simply lost. This circus should leave town now.”

The report Gableman presented to the Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee noted that “action would not, on its own, have any other legal consequence under state or federal law. It would not, for example, change who the current President is.”

Meanwhile, Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, said the issues raised in Gableman’s report “need to be taken seriously.”

He also accused the Elections Commission of repeatedly failing to follow the law in 2020.

“The lack of cooperation by WEC and some local election officials is not only troubling, but their obstruction of his investigation raises other serious issues,” Johnson said. “I will continue to study the Special Counsel’s findings and work to make sure no legitimate vote is canceled by a fraudulent one.”

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan called Gableman’s investigation an “amateur clown show.”

“This enormous waste of tax dollars was a national embarrassment yielding nothing but attacks on our democracy. It’s time for the GOP to end this charade and start working for the American people,” the Town of Vermont Dem said on Twitter.

U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, said Gableman’s investigation is a “stain on Wisconsin and a waste of taxpayer resources.”

Gableman’s report includes several alleged election violations, including the use of absentee ballot drop boxes. A Waukesha County judge ruled earlier this year that drop boxes aren’t permissible under state law.

Gableman also alleged that officials in five cities violated state bribery law by

accepting private money to cover public election costs. In 2020, a federal judge ruled there was no ban on the communities using the money.

— GOP U.S. Reps. Mike Gallagher and Scott Fitzgerald criticized Biden for signaling in the State of the Union the country is doing well as Americans face inflation and tumult in Europe.

In separate press releases, the two Republicans slammed Biden for what they consider a failure to address the issues. Fitzgerald, of Juneau, said Biden's decision to halt construction of the Keystone XL pipeline put America in a precarious position while trying to impose effective sanctions on Russia to respond to President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Gallagher, of Allouez, said Biden "doubled down on the same radical policies that created these crises and left Americans worse off. This is the literal definition of insanity."

"If the President is going to right the ship, he needs a course correction," he said. "The obvious way to start is by ending his administration's war on American energy, cutting off America's imports of Russian oil, and reinstating the Keystone Pipeline and the thousands of good-paying Wisconsin jobs that come with it."

Fitzgerald added Biden needs to bolster American energy production "to cut off Putin's lifeline."

"Talk is cheap, and it's clear President Biden owes the American people meaningful action to put our country back on track," he said.

[See the Gallagher release.](#)

[See the Fitzgerald release.](#)

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson responding to the State of the Union said Biden "seems oblivious to the harm his administration and policies have caused to Americans ensures that he will not change course and his failures will continue."

The Oshkosh Republican in a press release after the speech slammed Biden for instituting pandemic-related mandates, halting construction of former President Trump's border wall and other issues. He also said Biden's policies have emboldened enemies of the U.S. while embarrassing and weakening the country.

“It’s heartbreaking to watch what is happening in Ukraine,” he said. “America should pray for President Zelensky and for the Ukrainian people who just want to live in peace and freedom.”

[See the release](#)

— Wisconsin’s Democratic members of Congress said Biden was right to call the state America’s union strong during his speech because of his work to limit the pandemic’s impact, among other things.

Pocan in a press release praised Biden’s work since taking office to create jobs, vaccinate the world, invest in infrastructure, open schools, lower unemployment and address climate change.

“By leading with compassion, integrity, and strength, the Biden Administration is building a better America and getting our country back on track,” he said.

Kind said Biden delivered a powerful message that the U.S. will stand with Ukraine against Russia’s invasion.

“In times like these, it’s clear there’s far more that unites us as Americans rather than divides us as we join together in strong support of Ukraine and democracy everywhere,” he said.

Moore, of Milwaukee, in a tweet said Biden’s speech was amazing and she left feeling “deeply inspired.”

“I know many Americans are facing challenges, but President Biden reminded us of progress made on getting Americans vaccinated & the economy & provided an agenda on how to move America forward,” she said.

Baldwin, of Madison, also tweeted her thoughts.

“The American people have faced enormous challenges and persevered, working to move our country forward,” she said. “@POTUS has stood on the side of delivering results for Wisconsin and with more hard work together we can create more progress and build a better America.”

[See the Pocan release.](#)

[See the Kind release.](#)

[See the Moore tweet.](#)

[See the Baldwin tweet.](#)

— After the U.S. Senate failed to bring to a vote a bill to prohibit government restrictions on abortion services, Baldwin accused Republicans of blocking the legislation in the hopes that Roe v. Wade will be overturned.

60 votes were needed to bring the Women’s Health Protection Act to the floor for debate, but the motion to do so failed in a 46-48 vote. U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va. broke ranks and joined Republicans in opposition. U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson also voted against.

“The American people deserve to know where we stand and now they know who is with them on reproductive health care freedom, and who is not. Republicans are hoping the Supreme Court rolls back Roe, and will block Congress from acting to protect reproductive rights,” the Madison Dem said in a statement.

Baldwin reintroduced the legislation with U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-N.Y.

The bill would protect abortion rights as states crack down on them and Roe v. Wade is at risk with a strong conservative majority in the Supreme Court. Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization is currently pending in the Supreme Court and could do just that. The case concerns a Mississippi law banning abortion after 15 weeks.

Under the bill, governments could not require patients to disclose their reasons for seeking abortion services. They would also not allow governments to prohibit abortion services before or after fetal viability when pregnancy is a risk to the patient’s life or health.

The bill would also prohibit governments from limiting a provider’s ability to immediately provide abortion services when a delay risks the patient’s health, among other things.

Dem U.S. Reps. Gwen Moore, of Milwaukee; Mark Pocan, of the Town of Vermont; and Ron Kind, of La Crosse; are cosponsors of the bill. GOP U.S. Reps. Scott

Fitzgerald, of Juneau; Mike Gallagher, of Green Bay; Glenn Grothman, of Glenbeulah; Bryan Steil, of Janesville; and Tom Tiffany, of Minocqua; voted against the bill in the House last year.

— Kind criticized the state Natural Resources Board for failing to adopt agency-recommended standards for regulating PFAS and failing to address PFAS in groundwater.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances are a series of chemicals found in industrial and everyday products, most notably firefighting foam. They do not break down easily in the environment and are linked to several diseases and cancers in humans.

The La Crosse Dem, who is a member of the Congressional PFAS task force, said he is deeply disappointed and “our communities deserve better.”

“No Wisconsinite should have to worry about whether or not their drinking water is safe and this refusal to do more to combat PFAS contamination is just plain wrong,” he said.

The Department of Natural Resources had recommended a contamination limit of 20 parts per trillion for drinking water. But last week, the board rejected that standard and instead backed the Environmental Protection Agency’s guideline of 70 ppt.

The standard was approved 6-1 with Marcy West, an appointee of Gov. Tony Evers, opposed. Evers’ other two appointees on the board said they supported the measure to ensure there was some standard in place.

The board deadlocked 3-3 on proposed groundwater contamination standards, with one former Gov. Scott Walker appointee, Terry Hilgenberg, abstaining.

[See the release.](#)

— Moore is applauding the House’s unanimous approval of her bill to award a Congressional Gold Medal to the members of the Women’s Army Corps 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion.

The move is meant to honor the Black women who served in the 6888th during and shortly after WWII, when they addressed various mail backlogs across war-torn Europe by sorting and delivering millions of pieces of correspondence. Moore, D-

Milwaukee, in a press release said she is honored to recognize her heroes and their accomplishments by pushing the bill toward the finish line during Black History Month, more than seven decades after the women returned home.

“The Six Triple Eight was a trailblazing group of sheroes who were the only all-Black, Women Army Corps Battalion to serve overseas during World War II,” she said. “Facing both racism and sexism in a warzone, these women sorted millions of pieces of mail, closing massive mail backlogs, and ensuring service members received letters from their loved ones.”

[See the release.](#)

— Moore also in a floor speech supporting the CROWN Act to ban hairstyle discrimination said she has faced hair discrimination in the workplace.

The legislation, similar to laws passed in some states such as California, would ban discrimination based on a person’s hair texture or hairstyle if that style or texture is commonly associated with a particular race or national origin. Moore, the only Black member of Wisconsin’s delegation, said she has personally experienced hairstyle discrimination since kindergarten.

“Two minutes is not long enough to carry you on this journey of what it’s like to have your employers being told that you’re making them look bad because of the way your hair looks — and having hot combs, lye, all chemicals being burned —

[See the floor speech.](#)

— Tiffany and Fitzgerald joined a letter with other GOP members of the House Judiciary Committee asking for further information on the Biden administration’s efforts to address threats to school employees.

In October, U.S. Attorney General Garland sent out a memorandum that the Department of Justice would implement measures against “a disturbing spike in harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence against school administrators, board members, teachers, and staff.”

The memorandum directed the FBI and U.S. attorneys to discuss strategies to respond.

The GOP reps said the administration’s efforts “target concerned parents at local

school board meetings and chill their protected First Amendment activity.”

The GOP members say in the letter to Garland that they have sent “nearly 100 letters” requesting documents and information since October. GOP members said the AG’s lack of follow-through on document requests was obstruction and impeded their constitutional responsibility to conduct oversight.

“Your anti-parent directive remains in effect and, as a result, the FBI continues to “tag” American parents as potential counterterrorism threats,” they said.

Tiffany said on Twitter that the Biden administration “must be held accountable for labeling concerned parents as domestic terrorists.”

“Parents deserve answers!” Tiffany said.

[See the letter.](#)

— Fitzgerald signed onto a GOP House Judiciary Committee letter reiterating members’ request for information on the use of federal counterterrorism tools to target parents at school board meetings.

Republican Committee members in the letter say they have sent over 100 letters to the U.S. Department of Justice and White House requesting information on the issue. They said they’re investigating what they call a troubling attempts “to use the heavy hand of federal law enforcement – including federal counterterrorism tools – to target concerned parents at local school board meetings and chill their protected First Amendment activity.”

The Juneau Republican in a tweet said the sole response members have received, a half-page letter from the FBI, is not enough.

“No answers, no accountability,” he said. “The DOJ and the Biden Administration must do better.”

[See the tweet and letter.](#)

— The Wisconsin House reps also unanimously joined the rest of the House in approving the Emmett Till Antilynching Act as three GOP members in the whole House voted against it.

Moore, D-Milwaukee, in a tweet ahead of the vote said she's honored to support the legislation. While lynching is already a crime in the U.S., Moore said it's high-time to pass the legislation to elevate that crime to hate crime status.

"There were more than 6,500 racial terror lynchings in America between 1865 and 1950," she said. "Lynching is still not a federal hate crime."

[See the tweet.](#)

[See the roll call.](#)

Posts of the week

We have a great crew traveling to Wisconsin with [@POTUS](#) and [@FLOTUS](#) for the visit to [@uw_superior](#) today! [#BuildingABetterAmerica](#)
pic.twitter.com/sRh9UFpbao

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [March 2, 2022](#)

Great meeting so many folks Saturday at The Taste of Greece at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Wauwatosa! Go hungry!
pic.twitter.com/nbMc5AONNL

— Scott Fitzgerald (@FitzgeraldForWI) [February 28, 2022](#)

As an avid supporter of our nation's veterans, I always appreciate the opportunity to meet with [#WI](#) members of [@VFWHQ](#). Thank you for all you do for our country. pic.twitter.com/1at1qm9mca

— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [March 2, 2022](#)

This afternoon I joined my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to send a clear, bipartisan message: we stand with the people of Ukraine. 🇺🇸
pic.twitter.com/Zdptjhq9bW

— Archive: Rep. Ron Kind (@RepRonKind) [March 1, 2022](#)

The United States imports 595,000 barrels of Russian oil each day. We need to encourage energy independence instead of relying on Russia.

— Bryan Steil (@RepBryanSteil) [February 28, 2022](#)

My Dad was a likable local elected official who wanted to help people & a small biz owner who died too young. My Mom was also a small biz owner w/ a knack for getting things done. Corinne passed away last night at 93 after a brief fight with pneumonia & Covid. I'll miss you, Mom.
pic.twitter.com/CnGUCISbkg

— Rep. Mark Pocan (@RepMarkPocan) [March 2, 2022](#)

ICYMI

[Wisconsin Senators Baldwin and Johnson disagree on Women's Health Protection Act](#)

[Rep. Tom Tiffany announces Farm Act](#)

[Republicans and Democrats clash during hearing on racial discrimination in housing](#)

[Rep. Ron Kind shares thoughts on Russia's war on Ukraine and White House](#)

[response](#)