

Baldwin Campaign: Tammy Baldwin featured on The Axe Files, highlights work on health care, mental health & the opioid epidemic

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MADISON, Wis. — In case you missed it, Tammy Baldwin was interviewed by former White House Senior Advisor and Obama campaign chief strategist, David Axelrod, for his podcast The Axe Files. In the interview, Axelrod and Baldwin discussed their own family histories with mental health and substance abuse, and how those experiences have guided their work to reduce the price of healthcare and expand access to mental health services nationwide.

Listen to the interview [HERE](#).

Key Excerpts:

Fighting the Opioid, Fentanyl, & Heroin Epidemic

- **“My mother struggled with both physical and mental illness [...]. There’s a whole angle there about you know, when she was dealing with chronic pain, doctors in those days would prescribe opioids. And she had a lot of periods of her life where she was addicted [...]. **When I became much more public about sharing my mother’s story, the reaction that I got was unbelievably touching. Oftentimes, in a whispered voice, people would come and say, ‘That’s my brother, or you’ve just told the story of my daughter.’ And there was such a reaction of ‘we’re going through this too, you get us because you’re telling us that you’ve been through this too.’”****

- **“We took some fairly bold actions about five years ago, to attack the opioid crisis. I can say even in the last five years that has changed function. Five years ago it was heroin. And five years before that it was prescribed opioids and we’ve actually had a lot of success in training prescribers, that these (prescribed opioids) are highly addictive... We’ve changed the prescribing habits dramatically. And I’ve seen huge progress on that. But when you’re addicted, then you go, ‘Well, my doctor will give me that (prescribed opioids),’ so then it’s heroin. And then we saw fentanyl, which is 10 to 100 times more powerful than even heroin. And so the target is moving and we have to move hastily with it.”**

Making Health Care More Affordable

- **“I had a serious childhood illness at age nine [...]. And because I was a child with a preexisting condition, despite full recovery, nobody would have (covered me), ‘you can’t get insurance on a burning house.’ You can’t get insurance for a child who was sick at the time. And so as you suggest, well it is the issue that brought me into public life, into politics, and running for office - so I could play a role in making a difference on this issue.”**
- **“And I got to at the local level, the state level, and then imagine being on the Energy and Commerce Committee writing the Affordable Care Act or our version of it. And as you said, I championed the amendment that allows young people to stay on their parents health insurance until they’re 26. But also, importantly, I got to support a bill that prevented discrimination against people on the basis of a prior illness. Insurance companies can no longer say you’re uninsurable because you were sick once.”**

Expanding Farmers’ Mental Health Services

- **“The incidence of suicide and depression and isolation is quite significant... I see a lot in the rural communities, farmers and I represent a state where dairy farming is the frequent type of farming and the headwinds financially that small and medium size dairy farms have faced over the last couple of decades have been enormous. And I can’t imagine the stress and depression one might feel if you’re the fifth generation and you’re not able to keep it going. And so we’ve seen suicide rate and mental health crisis in rural America, and having culturally competent referrals for those mental health issues**

are really important to us. I think we have to keep on doing everything we can to make sure that there is not just a person to answer that phone call to 988 but there are the services to refer people to afterwards.”

Working for All Wisconsinites

- **“To me, showing up really really matters.** I often will show up in a community, and they’re like, ‘I can’t remember the last time I saw a U.S. Senator here, let alone a Democratic U.S. Senator.’ And then the conversation begins. And I listen.”
- **“I was on a dairy farm and we had asked the farmer to bring in some of his neighbors who also were in dairy farming. We talked about the challenges and the headwinds that they’re facing and solutions, and I talked about the issues that they have raised that I was championing in the U.S. Senate. A reporter covering the event had seen a Trump bumper sticker or something, but asked the host, ‘Who did you vote for in 2016, Trump? What about Tammy?’ The host responded, ‘Well, you just heard her, she’s championing all the issues that we are concerned about. She’s listening, she’s doing her job. Of course, I support her.’”**
- **“And, you know, these aren’t necessarily red, blue issues. These are not Democratic, Republican issues. These are things that reflect hard work on behalf of a constituency, and, frankly, we don’t have much harder workers than dairy farmers.”**