

Bill Kaplan: GOP wrecking crew abandons Ukraine

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GOP nihilists and Trump acolytes, including Wisconsin U.S. Reps. Scott Fitzgerald, Tom Tiffany, Derrick Van Orden and Senator Ron Johnson, are abandoning Ukraine. Their betrayal has intensified in the wake of California GOP Representative Kevin McCarthy's ouster as House speaker. When Florida GOP Representative Matt Gaetz made his motion to remove McCarthy he argued that McCarthy had made a "secret Ukraine side deal" with Democrats for their support to pass a stopgap funding bill keeping the government open. Gaetz always lies.

Johnson, continuing a pattern of interference in the House, reveled in McCarthy's removal. Moreover, he applauded the lack of assistance for Ukraine in the stopgap funding bill. Then Johnson endorsed Ohio GOP Representative Jim Jordan, an opponent of U.S. aid for Ukraine, as House speaker. Likewise, Fitzgerald and Trump are supporting Jordan. All of these politicians have in common an increasing vocal opposition to helping defend Ukraine. In July, Johnson voted to "limit availability of funds for support of Ukraine." Similarly, Fitzgerald has now voted multiple times to cut security assistance for Ukraine, most recently just before McCarthy was deposed.

Wisconsin GOP Representatives Tom Tiffany and Derrick Van Orden want to go further. Shortly before McCarthy lost his gavel, they voted to end military funding for Ukraine. Van Orden issued a press release full of gobbledygook: "Putin's invasion of Ukraine is illegal With that said, I (Van Orden) cannot in good conscience send U.S. tax dollars to Ukraine while our troops may not receive a paycheck this month." However, only GOP members of Congress were clamoring for a shutdown, now temporarily averted. Van Orden criticized "poor oversight" and "unconstrained funding to Ukraine", while taking partisan cheap shots at President Biden. Wisconsin GOP Representative Mike Gallagher, a strong supporter of military aid to Ukraine, should give a tutorial to his cowardly, feckless GOP colleagues.

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Opposition to helping Ukraine is growing. Trump has gone as far as supporting Russia's forcible annexation of Ukrainian territory. And, GOP presidential candidate Florida Governor Ron DeSantis cold-bloodedly dismissed Russia's invasion as a "territorial dispute." Although Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell strongly supports Ukraine, polls show declining support among GOP voters. One flimsy argument is the U.S. is spending too much. While the U.S. is the biggest donor to Ukraine, "aid accounts for less than 1 percent of federal spending and less than 0.3 percent of GDP" (NYT columnist Paul Krugman).

Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin, a leading opponent of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, said: "It is past time for the U.S. Congress to take up and pass legislation guaranteeing Ukraine has the critical resources necessary to continue defending themselves against Putin's illegal war." President Biden will press Democratic and GOP congressional leadership to make that happen. Biden will address the nation on "why it's critically important for the United States and our allies that we keep our commitment." American leadership is indispensable to defending vital interests in Ukraine, Israel, elsewhere and preventing wider wars. Americans must come together to stop aggression and support our allies.

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