

DC Wrap: Baldwin says lawmakers “cannot afford to play political games” on national security, wants to pass bill to support servicemembers

Posted on Thursday, Jul 20, 2023

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 best path for peace for Israel and Palestine is to recognize the expansion of illegal settlements & settler terrorism against Palestinians is wrong as are the open-air prison-like conditions in Gaza AND rockets fired from Gaza into Israel by extremists.

— U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, in a [tweet](#) on the day of Israeli President Isaac Herzog’s address before Congress. Pocan, who has criticized Israel, voted in favor of a resolution supporting the country and condemning antisemitism this week.

What an honor to have @Isaac_Herzog here on Capitol Hill today to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Israel’s statehood, and to reaffirm the U.S.-Israeli relationship. The U.S. stands strong with our friends in Israel.

— U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, in a [tweet](#).

This week’s news

— U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin told WisPolitics lawmakers “cannot afford to play political games” when it comes to national security and the country’s servicemembers after the House passed the nation’s military budget.

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Dems have blasted GOP amendments targeting abortion, transgender health care and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in the National Defense Authorization Act, which passed 219-210. Wisconsin Dems voted against the proposal, while Republicans supported it.

The measure includes a prohibition on funding travel for servicemembers to obtain abortions. Baldwin has introduced a bill to ensure the funding is protected under federal law.

“In the Senate, I am working with my Democratic and Republican colleagues to pass a bill that will support our service members and veterans, strengthen our national security, and boost our Made in America economy,” the Madison Dem said.

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, who has opposed the NDAA every year he’s been in office, said Republicans have “done away with all norms and stripped all bipartisanship from this bill.”

The GOP-led House rejected an amendment from the town of Vermont Dem to cut the Pentagon budget by \$100 billion.

“Moreover, this bill was littered with poison pill riders that attack the LGBTQ+ community, restrict access to abortion, and gut efforts to improve Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the military, undermining our national security and putting our troops in harm’s way,” Pocan said.

The House approved a batch of amendments to the nation’s military budget from Wisconsin Republicans.

Former Marine and Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party Chair U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher praised the measure for including many of his committee’s recommendations such as barring the Department of Defense from using defense consultants who also consult the People’s Liberation Army or affiliates.

The NDAA also includes the Allouez Republican’s CCP committee’s recommendations to require a conventional ground-based missile deployment

strategy in the Western Pacific and other plans to improve military capabilities to sink PLA ships, among other things.

“The CCP is launching cyber-attacks, stealing our intellectual property, attempting to coerce us economically, threatening war, and committing genocide,” the House Armed Services Committee member tweeted Monday. “The CCP has proven to be an enemy of freedom.”

U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, on Twitter said he was “disappointed” to see two of his amendments were “blocked” from the bill. That included amendments prohibiting race-based discrimination or preferential treatment within the Department of Defense or entities funded by DOD, and allowing the military to deploy troops to the U.S.-Mexico border.

The bill approved by the House included amendments:

- *From Tiffany to prohibit DOD from creating, procuring or displaying any map that shows Taiwan as part of Chinese territory;
- *From U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Janesville, requiring the secretary of defense and secretary of state to brief committees about weapons the U.S. has agreed to send to Ukraine and other allies in the region; and
- *From U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, requiring DOD-operated elementary and secondary schools to publish their curriculum online.

Dozens of controversial amendments also failed, such as:

- *Requiring President Biden, the Department of Defense and State Department to develop and submit to Congress their strategy for U.S. involvement in Ukraine, [129-301](#) with Gallagher, Pocan and Moore against;
- *Barring security assistance for Ukraine, [70-358](#) with Tiffany in favor; and
- *Striking \$300 million of Ukraine funding, [89-341](#) with Fitzgerald and Tiffany in favor.

[See Gallagher's tweet.](#)

— Pocan, chair of the Congressional Equality Caucus, also ripped House Republicans for ditching three earmark projects to provide services to the LGBTQ community worth \$3.62 million.

The 2nd CD Dem during an Appropriations Committee markup on transportation, housing and urban development said the move was “insane” and “bigoted.” The

first openly gay elected congressman from Wisconsin said most people don't care about LGBTQ issues unless they're personally affected by them.

He also told the story of when he was beaten unconscious with a baseball bat by two men who called him a slur after leaving a gay bar in Wisconsin before he was out.

"This is what you guys do by introducing amendments like this," he said. "Taking away from people's earmarks is absolutely below the dignity of Congress, and certainly the Appropriations Committee."

It's a slippery slope from attacking trans people to attacking everyone in the LGBTQI+ community, he argued. He wondered who's next.

"If you were to take away earmarks because they went to the NAACP or the Urban League, you would rightfully so be called racist bigots," he said. "But when you do it to the LGBTQI+ community, it's another fucking day in Congress."

[Watch Pocan's remarks.](#)

— Pocan, long critical of Israeli policies on Palestine, also praised a resolution supporting Israel ahead of President Isaac Herzog's visit today.

The House 412-9 with all Wisconsin members on board approved a measure supporting Israel and denouncing antisemitism. Pocan has blasted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli politicians for forcing Palestinians out of the West Bank and other anti-Palestine moves. The Town of Vermont Dem in a statement called the resolution "aspirational."

"It embodies what Israel wants to be and what we hope it is," he said. "But if we want to make this vision a reality, then as friends of Israel, we must point out the significant barriers to those aspirations - as any good friend would."

Republicans pushed the resolution after U.S. Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., called it a "racist state." Jayapal, chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, has apologized for the comments and voted for the resolution, which cleared the House 412-9.

Following the vote, U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, tweeted, "I voted to condemn antisemitism & affirm Israel is not a racist or apartheid state. In the wake

of disappointing comments made from the other side of the aisle, we must stand strongly with our Israeli allies, especially as we welcome President Herzog to Capitol Hill this week.”

Pocan also recommended the State Department appoint a special envoy to bring Israel and Palestine together to “find a path towards peace.”

“Israel is a friend of the United States,” he said. “Criticism of the Israeli government and their actions is not antisemitism – it’s real and honest friendship.”

Pocan in 2021 moved to block a \$735 million sales of American-made weapons to Israel, arguing the government has used U.S. provided munitions against innocent Palestinians, including children.

[See the roll call.](#)

[See the press release.](#)

— U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald introduced an education bill that would block the National Education Association from lobbying and engaging in other political activities.

The Juneau Republican in a statement said his Stopping Teachers Unions from Damaging Education Needs Today Act would make the NEA less divisive, more responsive to student needs and hold the union more accountable to students, parents and schools. Fitzgerald added the measure will “rein in some of the worst practices.”

“Since receiving its federal charter the NEA has strayed far from its original purpose, becoming little more than a political machine masking as an advocate for public education and students,” he said.

The bill would also:

- *Require NEA officer to be U.S. citizens;
- *Prohibit NEA affiliates from doing school walkouts; and
- *Require NEA to submit annual reports to Congress.

[See the press release.](#)

— U.S. Rep. Gallagher, R-Allouez, compared the “competition” of AI

development between the CCP and the U.S. to the Cold War, saying the West has a chance to use AI technology “for good.”

In a subcommittee meeting focused on the application of artificial intelligence on the battlefield, Gallagher consulted three AI experts on how the U.S. can become a global leader in using AI data. Witnesses were also asked to identify key countries to ally with to best shape ethical boundaries of AI use that will align with American values.

“I wonder if we could also be a leader in terms of the guardrails that a lot of our constituents are asking us about,” he said, highlighting the tension between development and ethical concerns. “Your average American understands we need to win this competition, but is concerned about uncontrolled AI.”

[See the press release](#)

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson in early May repaid himself \$400,000 of what he gave his campaigns in 2010 and 2016, despite insisting earlier this year he had no intentions of recouping money from old loans.

The Oshkosh Republican took steps in recent months to open the door to some of the repayments after U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, successfully challenged a \$250,000 cap on what federal candidates could raise after an election to pay back personal loans.

Dems knocked Johnson, accusing him of seeking to pay himself twice for money he used to defeat then-U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Middleton, 13 years ago.

Johnson received a \$10 million payout from Pacur, the plastics firm he helped found, shortly after winning that 2010 race, during which he poured \$9 million of his own money into the campaign. State Dem Party spokesperson Joe Oslund said Johnson is “bilking donors to pay himself back a second time” thanks to “bogus” arguments Cruz made before the U.S. Supreme Court.

“Ron Johnson owes Ted Cruz a thank you note for helping him put together the down payment for his next private jet,” Oslund said.

Johnson still has more than \$8 million in outstanding loans from his 2010 and 2016 campaigns listed on his latest campaign finance report, and a Johnson adviser said the senator “has little expectation that the loans will be repaid.”

In a story it posted May 17 on the old loans, Insider quoted Johnson saying he had no plans to recoup the money.

But his campaign had already repaid the \$400,000 — \$210,000 for the 2010 race and \$190,000 for 2016 — two weeks earlier, according to his campaign finance report filed over the weekend.

Overall, Johnson reported raising \$924,149 during the three-month quarter and spending nearly \$1.2 million, including the loan repayments. He listed \$549,305 in the bank.

Johnson's second quarter report also listed nearly \$9.5 million in debts, including the old campaign loans.

— Johnson had forgiven the 2010 loans and dropped them from his campaign finance reports until shortly after the Supreme Court ruling in Cruz's suit.

Following his 2018 reelection, Cruz challenged the previous cap of \$250,000 on what candidates could raise post-election to cover personal loans they had made to their campaign. The restriction was included in the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act, often dubbed the McCain-Feingold Act.

Following the 6-3 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in May 2022 striking down the limit, the Federal Elections Commission issued an advisory opinion in August that candidates could reinstate loans they had previously forgiven and converted to a candidate contribution. The FEC opined campaigns could repay those old loans with money currently on hand or through new fundraising.

In his October FEC filing, Johnson added back those 2010 debts and one from 2016 to his campaign. His latest financial disclosure filed in May listed the loans owed to him personally, stating “all funds to prior campaigns have been deemed loans and suitable for repayment” following the Supreme Court's ruling in the Cruz suit.

The Johnson adviser noted some of the repayments for 2016 covered debts that were eligible for repayment even before the Supreme Court ruling in the Cruz case.

Following the \$400,000 in repayments, Johnson still listed nearly \$8 million in outstanding loans from his 2010 campaign, as well as \$28,851 from his 2016 bid. He also listed a debt of more than \$1.4 million to Targeted Victory LLC. The

Arlington, Va.-based firm did digital consulting and online advertising for Johnson during his 2022 campaign and has continued work helping him fundraise post-election. That includes \$255,193 in expenses during the second quarter of this year.

Johnson's email fundraising appeals often mention his remaining debts, though they focus on the 2022 election. One sent this morning says Johnson "survived a bruising campaign battle with the Left" and "winning took everything I had, and more. I took on some campaign debt, and now it's time to pay it off." The email appeals for donations to help Johnson "finally see this campaign through to the end so I can double down on our Conservative efforts in the Senate."

The email includes a hyperlink to a WinRed page.

[See the WinRed page.](#)

[See Q2 Johnson's report.](#)

[See Johnson's May 15 financial disclosure.](#)

— U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, more than tripled his fundraising during the second quarter of the year as he began publicly considering a bid for the U.S. Senate, according to his latest filing.

But the \$113,739 he raised was the smallest amount reported by any of Wisconsin's House members and was dwarfed by the nearly \$3.3 million U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, raised during the second three months of the year.

Insiders have been watching Tiffany's fundraising during the reporting period as some have questioned whether he's serious about a run for the Senate or is trying to raise his profile for a future statewide bid. He has not been known as a strong fundraiser while in Congress and raised just \$37,195 during the first quarter of 2023.

Tiffany's report shows his fundraising total included \$78,239 from individuals. Of that, \$23,467 came from unitemized donations, which is typically a gauge of a candidate's small-dollar donor operation. He also pulled in \$35,500 from PACs.

Tiffany spent \$85,418 during the period, leaving him with \$364,612 in the bank. U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, is the only Wisconsin member who had a smaller war chest at the end of June.

[See Tiffany's filing.](#)

— **Baldwin's spent \$1.65 million during the quarter and finished June with more than \$5.5 million in the bank.**

Her campaign previously announced she'd raised more than \$3.2 million for the period, but hadn't released either number ahead of Saturday's filing.

Her haul included \$704,116 in unitemized individual donations. She also reported \$332,745 from PACs and \$203,690 in transfers from other committees.

Baldwin's campaign says the nearly \$3.3 million she raised was the best quarter in a non-election year for a Wisconsin candidate for U.S. Senate.

[See her filing.](#)

— **U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Janesville, was the top fundraiser of Wisconsin's House members, while U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Allouez, had the largest war chest.**

Steil reported \$827,750 raised, \$186,132 spent and \$2.85 million in the bank. That was the second best war chest to the \$3.7 million Gallagher had for cash on hand.

Steil's southeastern Wisconsin district is one of two Wisconsin seats that could be competitive next fall, especially if a challenge filed with the state Supreme Court results in new maps.

Dems are already targeting western Wisconsin's 3rd CD. Freshman GOP Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Prairie du Chien, reported \$709,781 raised during the quarter and \$362,734 spent. The haul pushed Van Orden's cash on hand just past the \$1 million mark, though he also listed \$101,797 in debts.

Former small business owner Rebecca Cooke so far is the only Dem to announce plans to challenge Van Orden, though others are considering a run.

[See Steil's report.](#)

[See Van Orden's.](#)

— **The fundraising numbers for the rest of the House members are:**

*U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, \$118,851 raised, \$168,682 spent, \$840,602 cash on hand.

[See Pocan's filing.](#)

*U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, \$117,217 raised, \$183,897 spent, \$25,453 in the bank.

[See Moore's filing.](#)

*U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, \$155,128 raised, \$85,789 spent, \$510,351 cash on hand.

[See Fitzgerald's filing.](#)

*U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothman, R-Glenbeulah, \$142,864 raised, \$117,211 spent, \$480,426 in the bank. He also listed \$139,110 in debts.

[See Grothman's filing.](#)

*U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Allouez, \$604,508 raised, \$206,319 spent, \$3.7 million cash on hand.

[See Gallagher's filing.](#)

Posts of the week

Today we remember the inspiring soul of my dear friend John Lewis on the anniversary of his passing.

A beacon of courage, justice, and equality, his legacy lives on. Let's honor his memory by continuing to carry the torch of change he lit for generations to come. pic.twitter.com/eqaWn67li7

— Rep. Gwen Moore (@RepGwenMoore) [July 17, 2023](#)

Prayers for a successful recovery for Pastor Schmidt of St. John's Lutheran Church in Oak Creek. I had the honor of meeting Pastor Schmidt and his family just a few weeks ago. He and his community at St. John's does amazing work pic.twitter.com/gTag3jYFK7

— Bryan Steil (@RepBryanSteil) [July 17, 2023](#)

Too often, folks in rural areas are forced to delay or forgo care because of long drives or wait times to see a doctor. That's why I was proud to support the new Memorial Hospital of Lafayette Co. to ensure Wisconsinites can access the care they need to lead healthy lives. pic.twitter.com/vDuwDUJ8LA

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [July 17, 2023](#)

You can't fund infrastructure with magic. Thank goodness for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill! [@HouseDemocrats](#) and [@POTUS](#) get things done! pic.twitter.com/nhsPIMwNAt

— Rep. Mark Pocan (@RepMarkPocan) [July 17, 2023](#)

Fantastic time celebrating Independence Day at the [#Berlin](#) Let Freedom Ring Festival in Riverside Park! pic.twitter.com/toHmAzZakX

— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [July 17, 2023](#)

Last night, Rep. Van Orden hosted a Veterans' Tele-Town Hall with [@HouseVetAffairs](#) Chairman [@RepBost](#).

They covered issues from mental health, to substance abuse, to community care, to the PACT Act, to helping veterans access benefits, and more. pic.twitter.com/gKOcm0TeoY

— Rep. Derrick Van Orden Press Office (@RepVanOrden) [July 18, 2023](#)

ICYMI

[The Hill: Snowflake,' 'bigot,': Spending hearing erupts over funding for LGBTQ projects](#)

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Scott Mayer, a prospective GOP challenger to Sen. Tammy Baldwin, remains reluctant for now](#)

[WPR: Wisconsin's top elections official interviewed as part of federal Jan. 6 investigation](#)

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Field of Democrats considering challenge to Derrick Van Orden in purple congressional district expands](#)