

DC Wrap: Johnson praises Trump DHS appointee Mullin in Senate confirmation hearing

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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.](#)

Quotes of the week

The fact that these men and women at TSA aren't getting paid at the airports is absolutely offensive. The fact that the Democrats are refusing to move forward on this spending bill just shows you how radicalized Democrats in the United States Senate have become.

- U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Janesville, on an ongoing standoff over funding for the Department of Homeland Security that has left TSA agents without pay and resulted in long lines at airports.

A reminder that Democrats want TSA agents to be paid. We've supported targeted funding to keep airport security workers on the job. What we won't do is sign off on a DHS funding bill that lets ICE continue to terrorize our communities. Congressional Republicans are refusing to separate the two for political gain.

- U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont.

This week's news

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— **Wisconsin's GOP senator praised President Donald Trump's nominee for Homeland Security secretary in a committee hearing yesterday.**

Trump has nominated Oklahoma U.S. Sen. Markwayne Mullin, a Republican, to

succeed former South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem to lead DHS after the latter's ouster from the role last week.

Kentucky U.S. Sen. Rand Paul and Democrats on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee pressed Mullin on statements where he insinuated he'd participated in "classified" overseas military operations, though Mullin has never served in the military.

Democratic U.S. Sens. Gary Peters of Michigan and Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut took Mullin to task for statements he made on the fatal shootings of Minneapolis residents Alex Pretti and Renee Good by immigration agents during widespread protests.

Mullin said he regretted calling Pretti "deranged" but stopped short of offering an apology for Pretti's family and defended his claim that Good's killing was justified.

Since those killings, the president has removed Noem from DHS leadership and scaled back the high-profile, militarized immigration raids that have targeted American cities like Minneapolis.

Paul also criticized Mullin for making disparaging remarks about Paul after the Kentucky senator was attacked in 2017 and for other instances where Mullin had appeared to endorse political violence.

U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, however, used his time to praise Mullin and ask him to tell stories about Mullin's relationships with Dem lawmakers and President Donald Trump.

"You want somebody with integrity, somebody with that passion toward the mission of keeping this country safe," the Oshkosh Republican said.

Johnson [said](#) on X last week that he planned to support Mullin for the nomination, posting a picture of the two of them in a congressional office.

A committee vote on Mullin's nomination is scheduled for today.

Johnson's office did not respond to questions about Mullin's prolific stock trading habits, which have grown the Oklahoma senator's assets tenfold to between \$29 million and \$97 million as of 2024, just over a decade after he first entered Congress as a U.S. House member.

The New York Times published a story Sunday highlighting Mullin's trading practices, including buying shares of Chevron days before the United States attacked Venezuela and seized its president, Nicolas Maduro.

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, does not serve on the committee that held the hearing but in a statement to WisPolitics voiced skepticism about Mullin.

"I have always said that I will give every nominee the chance to make their case, but I have to be honest, it will be an uphill battle for Senator Mullin, who cheered on ICE's lawlessness and defended the killing of American citizens," Baldwin said.

— U.S. Rep. Derrick Van Orden is vowing to vote against Senate bills "unless they have 80%+ approval from Americans" until the body passes a House-approved election bill.

"I am done with this buffoonery," the Prairie du Chien Republican said in a [post](#) on X.

The bill in question, the SAVE America Act, would impose new [voting restrictions](#), including requiring proof of citizenship to register to vote and imposing new photo ID requirements, among other measures. Noncitizens are already prohibited from voting in federal elections. Meanwhile, groups from across the political spectrum have noted noncitizen voting is rare.

A spokesperson for Van Orden did not immediately respond to an inquiry from WisPolitics on how Van Orden would determine which bills are supported by 80% or more of Americans.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., this week kicked off debate on the proposal amid pressure from Trump to pass it. The bill is expected to fail due to a lack of GOP support and opposition from Democrats.

Van Orden said if the Senate brought the legislation to the floor knowing it would fail, "then I don't know why they even exist as a body," adding: "This is horseshit."

U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, this week again called for Republicans to change Senate rules to pass the SAVE America Act.

"Put Democrats on the record. Make them vote on changing the filibuster rule. Do they want to end the filibuster with Republicans in control?" Johnson said in a [post](#)

on X.

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, has argued the bill would make it harder to vote.

— U.S. AG Pam Bondi has put Brad Schimel back in charge of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Milwaukee, a week after the federal judges on the Eastern District refused to keep him in that leadership role.

The appointment as the first assistant U.S. attorney means Schimel will have the same role and responsibilities leading the office as he did after Bondi appointed him interim.

Schimel, the former state Republican AG, said in a statement he is grateful for the opportunity.

"I will continue to work tirelessly to make the entire district safer and stronger," said Schimel, who ran unsuccessfully for the state Supreme Court last year. "I look forward to continuing to work with the remarkable team in this office and our amazing justice system partners to accomplish our important mission."

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, has been critical of Schimel's appointment to the job and earlier this month urged the judges on the Eastern District not to keep him in the post.

She called the new move an "illegal stunt."

Meanwhile, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, praised the move, saying it would provide time to identify a candidate for a full-time appointment to the job who could be confirmed by the Senate.

[See more in Wednesday's PM Update.](#)

— U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin is [praising](#) news the U.S. Department of Transportation has approved more than \$1 billion to replace the Blatnik Bridge after pushing Secretary Sean Duffy to sign off on the funding.

The funding was included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law signed by former President Joe Biden. Baldwin, along with fellow senators in Minnesota and Gov. Tony Evers, had urged Duffy to release funding to replace the 65-year-old bridge

between Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior.

“There is no good reason these funds should have been held up in the first place, and I am glad we forced the Trump Administration to do right by Wisconsin,” Baldwin, D-Madison, said. “Rebuilding this bridge will mean that billions of dollars’ worth of products can get to market efficiently, families can get to work on time, and millions of travelers get to their destinations safely.”

U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, also hailed the funding.

“With federal funding now secured, this project can move forward to deliver modern, reliable infrastructure that supports good-paying union jobs, strengthens supply chains, and provides safer commutes,” Tiffany said.

— Members of the 7th CD Republican Party declined to endorse anyone in the race for the district’s open congressional seat.

Michael Alfonso, the son-in-law of U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, has been endorsed by President Donald Trump, the top House leaders and most members of the state’s GOP congressional delegation. Several of Alfonso’s rivals said the party’s decision not to endorse means the race for the Republican nomination remains wide open.

“Ultimately, this race can’t be bought — it has to be earned by showing up, listening to voters, and winning their trust,” said Jessi Ebben, who ran for the 3rd CD unsuccessfully in 2020.

Seeking the GOP nomination are: Alfonso; Ebben; Niina Baum, co-founder of Northwoods Young Professionals; Kevin Hermening, a financial adviser and former Marathon County GOP chair; and Paul Wassgren, a businessman. Current GOP U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany is running for governor.

[See more in Monday’s AM Update.](#)

— A new [bipartisan proposal](#) from U.S. Reps. Glenn Grothman, R-Glenbeulah, and Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, seeks to protect bodies of water from invasive species such as Asian carp.

Under the SAFE Pathways Act, federal agencies would have to account for the threat of invasive species when building fishways, structures that help fish navigate

around obstacles like dams or waterfalls.

“Fishways are an important tool to help native species thrive, but if they’re poorly designed or located, they can unintentionally create highways for invasive species that devastate our waters, harm wildlife, and cost taxpayers billions in damage and cleanup,” Grothman said.

The North American Invasive Species Management Association and Great Lakes Fishery Commission are backing the proposal.

Posts of the week

Agriculture isn’t just a week in Wisconsin, it’s a way of life.

Our farmers and producers drive over \$116 billion in economic impact for our state.

During National Agriculture Week, we thank the hardworking men and women who work around the clock to fuel America. 🇺🇸

pic.twitter.com/L7rluZhjqj

— Rep. Derrick Van Orden (@RepVanOrden) [March 16, 2026](#)

ICYMI: I helped pass the LARGEST housing package in decades to make housing more affordable! 🏠

We are:

✂️ Cutting red tape

🏠 Building more housing

🔨 And cracking down on Wall Street investors buying up homes in our communities. <https://t.co/oYYSSF076B>

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [March 18, 2026](#)

St. Patrick's Day at the White House with [@SecDuffy](#) 
pic.twitter.com/0I9ch5tXeD

— Bryan Steil (@RepBryanSteil) [March 17, 2026](#)

ICYMI

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: [Ron Johnson says he'll work with Baldwin to reopen US attorney talks](#)

WEAU: [Sen. Baldwin calls for public hearings on war in Iran](#)

Spectrum News 1: [Sean Duffy talks rural investments, rising gas prices in visit to Sparta](#)

WEAU: [Sec. Duffy and Congressman Van Orden tout highway funding in Monroe County](#)

Fox 11: [Wied, Steil call for federal investigation into Newcap](#)

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: [Governor candidate Tom Tiffany sends mixed signals on mail-in voting](#)