

Congressional Democrats unveil phony “Better Deal” ahead of 2018 midterms

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Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer of New York and Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, along with other congressional Democrats, unveiled their proposal, “A Better Deal,” on Monday. “A Better Deal” combines economic nationalism and pro-business policies with the most tepid reforms, to some extent bridging the gap between the Clinton-Schumer and Sanders-Warren wings of the Democratic Party.

The plan comes in the aftermath of the Democrats’ debacle in the 2016 election and is clearly oriented toward the 2018 midterm elections and the 2020 presidential election. “A Better Deal” is a transparent exercise in empty sloganeering and threadbare rhetorical populism. It has three initial stated goals: reducing prescription drug prices, strengthening antitrust laws and increasing jobs and wages for American workers. These goals are to be implemented via policies that are, in Warren’s words, “pro-market.”

The plan comes in the wake of a poll last week by ABC News and the *Washington Post* that 52 percent of Americans think the Democratic Party “just stands against Trump,” while only 37 percent think that it “stands for something.” Schumer recognized as much in an op-ed in yesterday’s *New York Times*, in which he acknowledged that “many Americans don’t know what we [Democrats] stand for.”

The stated goal of “A Better Deal” is to “show the country that [the Democrats are] the party on the side of working people,” in Schumer’s words. The idea that Schumer, who has received tens of millions in donations from Wall Street and the wealthiest Americans for his campaigns, would propose and implement pro-worker reforms, borders on the absurd.

Schumer told the *Washington Post* during the weekend leading up to Monday’s unveiling: “When you lose to somebody who has 40 percent popularity

[Trump], you don’t blame other things—Comey, Russia—you blame yourself. So what did we do wrong? People didn’t know what we stood for, just that we were against Trump. And still believe that.”

The Democratic contingent, which also included House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California, traveled to Berryville, Virginia for the unveiling of “A Better Deal.” Berryville is a small town at the edge of the Washington, D.C. metro area, and is represented by Barbara Comstock, a Republican, in the House. Commentators have noted that the Democrats should aim to win Comstock’s seat if they plan on retaking the House.

The Berryville press conference generally repeated the line of Schumer’s op-ed in the *Times*: America used to be a country with a substantial “middle class,” American workers “believe they’re getting a raw deal from both the economic and political systems in our country” and the Democrats have to acknowledge these sentiments and rhetorically address them to remain relevant.

The plan builds on the Democrats’ existing policy proposals, including an infrastructure plan, which Schumer has previously said could be reconciled with Trump’s corporate giveaway infrastructure plan, and a \$15 minimum wage that, even if implemented, would leave workers well below a living wage.

One of the main provisions in the Democrats’ plan is a call for reducing monopolies, thereby “ensur[ing] capitalism works for all Americans.” This is described primarily in terms of supporting smaller businesses that cannot compete with monopolists and secondarily in terms of benefiting consumers.

Under “A Better Deal,” mergers of large corporations would supposedly be subject to extra scrutiny before and after a merger. There would also be a “new

competition advocate” that would “recommend competition investigations to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).” This would be a largely toothless body, similar to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, established by Warren.

The Democrats’ plan for job-creation centers mainly on giving tax credits to businesses to train and hire workers, while expanding federal support for apprenticeship programs. “A Better Deal” also calls for public-private partnerships in education under the name of “blending classroom learning and worksite training.” Calling for the subordination of education to the demands of corporations, the plan suggests “giving employers a role in curriculum development.”

“A Better Deal” also contains a component for reducing prescription drug prices. (This is in lieu of even the inadequate Medicare-for-all plan proposed by Senator Bernie Sanders.) Reducing drug prices would be primarily done through the creation of a new regulatory agency with the power to fine companies that increase drug prices too much, as well as allowing Medicare Part D to negotiate drug prices.

While the antitrust body, tax credits and drug-hiking regulations are the main policies released on Monday, the Democrats promise that the coming weeks will see additional measures, which will likely include economic nationalist proposals amenable to Trump and his fascist adviser Steve Bannon. The “Better Deal” text says, “We will aggressively crack down on unfair foreign trade and fight back against corporations that outsource American jobs.”

This sentence, combined with the refrain of “the American worker” during the press conference, indicates the economic nationalism that has been favored by Schumer and Sanders, as well as Trump and Bannon. This has nothing to do with defending American workers, but is rather aimed at benefiting American corporations at the expense of their rivals, in a begger-thy-neighbor trade war policy the ultimate logic of which is a military war.

While “A Better Deal” appears to represent a coming together of different factions within the Democratic Party, it may also provide a basis for bipartisan cooperation in attacking the working class. During the press conference, Schumer repeated that he would be willing to work with Republicans, setting the stage for

potential “compromises” on healthcare, infrastructure and economic nationalism.



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