

Selling Biden's infrastructure plan: Identity politics and anti-Chinese nationalism

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The Biden administration has begun a campaign to seek support for the president's proposed infrastructure plan, which would provide \$2.25 trillion for a range of physical and social infrastructure projects, ranging from roads and bridges to rural broadband and increased spending on child care and care for the elderly.

After his first formal cabinet meeting last week, Biden announced that he has asked five cabinet members to make the public case for the so-called American Jobs Plan. These are: Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia L. Fudge, Labor Secretary Martin Walsh and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

The five include three women, one of them African American, a gay man and a former union bureaucrat, thus embodying the identity politics of the Democratic Party. Identity politics seeks to disguise the Democrats' loyalty to the Wall Street financial aristocracy by promoting the interests of sections of the upper middle class who seek a "fairer" distribution of wealth within the top 10 percent of society.

The five were not picked at random, but just about any five members of the Biden cabinet would have served as a similar demonstration of "diversity." Gushing media commentaries after the first cabinet meeting—delayed until 23 of Biden's 24 nominees had received Senate approval—noted that only six out of the 23 are straight white men, while at a similar stage in Trump's cabinet, 18 out of 23 were in that category.

These commentaries entirely ignore the substance of the policies pursued by the Biden administration. In its demands that schools reopen and parents go back to work, regardless of the threat to health and life from COVID-19, the Biden administration is just as brutally opposed to the interests of the working class as the

Trump administration.

In its foreign policy, based on confronting China and Russia directly, the Biden administration is even more flagrantly and consistently aggressive than the Trump administration, even if it proceeds with soporific rather than directly provocative language.

The infrastructure plan, despite its presentation by apologists like Bernie Sanders as the greatest step forward for progressive, social reform politics since the Great Society of Lyndon Johnson, or even Roosevelt's New Deal, is entirely integrated into the fundamentally right-wing policies of the Biden-Harris administration.

In their first appearances on the Sunday television interview programs as advocates for the Biden plan, both Secretary of Transportation Buttigieg and Secretary of Energy Granholm sought to present spending on infrastructure as an important part of the US response to China's rise as a global power.

Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," Buttigieg declared, "The American Jobs Plan is not about short-term stimulus. It's about making sure that America is positioned to compete for the next decade and for the generation ahead. We know that China and our other strategic competitors are already making major investments. It's time for America to lead the way again."

One of NBC's paid commentators, former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, summed up the Biden political strategy as follows: "On infrastructure, if you vote no, you're with China. If you vote yes, you're with America," adding, "They're picking the right enemies."

Speaking on CNN's "State of the Union" program, Secretary of Energy Granholm, the former governor of Michigan, spelled out the economic nationalism of the plan in more detail.

“I look at this from being a former governor of a manufacturing state ... for decades now, we have watched our manufacturing jobs leave. We’re at a 70-year low. This bill says we’re going to make stuff in America. We’re going to make the means to our own energy security. I mean, it is an amazing statement that, finally, we’re going to invest in America, instead of watching all of these other countries beat us to the punch.”

She continued, “Part of that investment is making sure that we can build the batteries in the US for electrifying transportation and for energy storage, instead of getting those batteries from our economic competitors. China came out with their most recent five-year plan. And they have a plan to corner the market on the supply chain for batteries ... we can just sit there and watch that happen. Or we can decide, no, we want to build that stuff here.”

The anti-China thrust of the Biden infrastructure plan was underscored in an opinion column by retired US Army Gen. John Adams, published in *Newsweek* magazine. In words that echoed Granholm’s, Adams cited the importance of rebuilding US capacity in steel, aluminum and microchips and the danger of relying on China as the principal supplier of all three.

“We cannot rely on geopolitical rivals for the raw materials and critical components essential to US national security,” he wrote. “If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it’s that America must maintain control over critical supply chains, such as pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and critical metals such as steel and aluminum. COVID has disrupted global supply chains on a wide range of goods, from automobiles to semiconductors, as well as hindered global transportation networks.

“Consider the ongoing disruption in COVID vaccine supply as European governments are refusing to allow vaccine exports to other countries. It is no stretch to imagine a similar situation; if the US had to acquire high purity aluminum from Russia or the Middle East during a crisis, would they deny us the materials? ... Our very national security and prosperity would be jeopardized if America is dependent on Russia, China, India, and the Middle East for aluminum.”

Notably, while invoking the Chinese bogeyman, neither representative of the Biden administration gave prominence to corporate opposition to the proposed rise

in the corporate tax rate from 21 percent to 28 percent. On the contrary, Granholm took care to point out that Biden was choosing not to return the rate to 35 percent, the level that prevailed before the 2017 Trump tax cut for the wealthy. She called the 28 percent rate offered by Biden, leaving half the Trump tax cut in the pockets of big business, “the reasonable middle.”

The RATE Coalition, a corporate lobby in Washington that numbers AT&T, Fedex, Kimberly-Clark, Home Depot, Toyota and UPS as members, attacked the tax increase in a statement issued in the name of Blanche Lincoln, a former Democratic senator from Arkansas and longtime colleague of Biden, now turned lobbyist for giant corporations.

None of the Biden spokespeople, in many media interviews over the course of the weekend, has chosen to focus on the brazen tax dodging and tax avoidance carried out by corporate America. According to a new study released by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 55 large corporations paid no federal income taxes at all last year, despite raking in \$40.5 billion in pretax income. If they had paid at the current rate, 21 percent, they would have paid a total of \$8.5 billion in income tax. Instead, they collected tax refunds totaling \$3.5 billion.

“Their total corporate tax breaks for 2020, including \$8.5 billion in tax avoidance and \$3.5 billion in rebates, comes to \$12 billion,” the ITEP report said.

Twenty-six of the Fortune 500 companies have paid zero income tax since 2017, when the Trump tax cut was passed. These include such household names as FedEx, Duke Energy, Nike, and DTE Energy, the Detroit-based utility that was notorious for shutting off electricity for impoverished households in Detroit and its working class suburbs. DTE gained an accelerated refund of tax credits totaling \$220 million from the CARES Act, passed with near-unanimous bipartisan support last year.



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