

Biden pleads with Republicans for bipartisan infrastructure bill

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President Joe Biden completed three days of high-level meetings at the White House where he has sought some semblance of Republican support for the \$2.3 trillion infrastructure bill his administration put forward last month. While repeatedly praising these talks as “good faith” negotiations, he has evaded the obvious contradiction: The party with whom he is bargaining denies his own legitimacy as president.

The Republican Party is entirely subordinated to former President Donald Trump, who has declared the 2020 election a fraud and Biden an illegitimate president. On Wednesday morning, the House Republican Conference removed Representative Liz Cheney as its chair because she opposed Trump’s baseless claims of election fraud and held him responsible for the January 6 attack on Congress.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy engineered a swift purge of Cheney—in response to orders from Trump—and 90 minutes later was sitting in the White House meeting with Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, side by side with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Afterwards McCarthy denied the obvious contradiction, saying that he now acknowledged Biden as the president and was not seeking to dispute the election any further. But his political office sent out a fundraising letter only minutes after the meeting, declaring, “I just met with Corrupt Joe Biden and he’s STILL planning to push his radical Socialist agenda onto the American people.”

This political reality—that the Republican Party denies the legitimacy of the Biden administration—underlies the entire process of “bargaining” and “negotiations” which is under way. In keeping with the longstanding trend in American capitalist politics, the Democratic Party, which controls the White House and both houses of Congress, acts as the supplicant, and the Republican Party, which lost the 2020 presidential election by a considerable margin, seven million votes, acts as though it had a political mandate.

Behind the Republicans there is a sizable fascist element

spearheaded by ex-President Trump, with significant support within the institutions of the capitalist state, particularly the police and military. That support was given voice in an extraordinary open letter, published Monday and signed by 124 retired “flag officers” (former generals and admirals), vilifying Biden and the Democratic Party, and indicating their support for Trump’s claims of a stolen election.

These retired officers combine the anticommunist delusion that under Biden “our Country has taken a hard left turn toward Socialism and a Marxist form of tyrannical government” with a ferocious hostility towards China, and the insistence that American society must direct all its efforts to counter the drive of the “Chinese Communist Party ... to continue progress toward world domination, militarily, economically, politically and technologically.”

Among the 124 signatories are retired Army Brig. Gen. Don Bolduc, who was a failed candidate for US Senate in New Hampshire in 2020 and is running again in 2022; retired Army Lt. Gen. William Boykin, notorious for his Christian fundamentalist views, who held high Pentagon positions in the George W. Bush administration; and two figures from the Iran-Contra affair of 1986-87: retired Vice Adm. John Poindexter, deputy national security adviser for President Ronald Reagan, and retired Air Force Major General Richard Secord, once the Pentagon’s top man in Thailand and later in Iran, when it was ruled by the Shah.

In other words, these officers have long and well-established connections to the Republican Party and to previous Republican administrations. They come forward now as a full-fledged fascist battalion taking sides with Trump against the Biden administration.

Biden has sought to downplay all questions related to the January 6 attack on Congress and the incessant attacks by the fascist right on the legitimacy of the 2020 elections and of his administration. Instead, he has intensified efforts to reach a bipartisan agreement with the Republicans on his top legislative priorities, the American Jobs Plan and the American Family Plan, which total \$4.1 trillion in spending on infrastructure and social programs.

On Tuesday Biden met virtually with Republican and Democratic governors, then held his first face-to-face meeting with the four top Democratic and Republican congressional leaders on Wednesday. This was followed by a face-to-face meeting with six Republican senators on Thursday, where the president was at pains to present their \$568 billion infrastructure counteroffer (barely one-fourth of the bill he proposed) as a serious start to negotiations.

Both Biden and Senator Shelly Moore Capito of West Virginia, the leader of the group of Republican senators, were effusive in their assessment of the 90-minute meeting Thursday.

“We’re very encouraged,” Capito told reporters afterwards. “The attitude the president had in the Oval Office with us was very supportive and desirous of striking a deal.”

Biden sounded a similar tune, saying, “I am very optimistic that we can reach a reasonable agreement—and even if we don’t, it’s been a good faith effort.” He said the group of Republican senators was to rework their offer in light of the discussion and return next week for further talks.

The meeting included two members of the Republican leadership, John Barrasso of Wyoming and Roy Blunt of Missouri, as well as fiscal conservatives Mike Crapo of Idaho, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania and Roger Wicker of Mississippi.

Biden was joined by Vice President Kamala Harris, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

The Republican position, articulated by the six senators Thursday and by McConnell and McCarthy on Wednesday, was to limit the term infrastructure to physical components like roads, bridges, airports and broadband, while excluding any social component like education, health care services or child care.

They also insisted that there could not be the slightest reversal of the 2017 tax cut for corporations and the wealthy. “We’re not interested in reopening the 2017 tax bill. We both made that clear with the president. That’s our red line,” McConnell said after his White House meeting. “This discussion ... will not include revisiting the 2017 tax bill.”

The arrogance of this declaration is quite striking. Virtually the only substantive issue on fiscal policy raised by the Democrats in the 2020 elections was to criticize the 2017 tax cut as a windfall for the wealthy. Public opinion polls show that raising taxes on corporations and the rich is overwhelmingly popular.

If US government policy were actually determined by popular sentiment, tax increases on the rich would be the first order of business. But under capitalism, the state is an instrument of the capitalist class, not the “people,” and

public policy is determined by the interests of the superrich owners of the banks and corporations.

As it is, Biden only proposed to reverse half the 2017 tax cut for the corporations, which took their income tax rate down from 35 percent to 21 percent. Under the Biden administration plan, this would be raised only to 28 percent, although Biden considers even that level negotiable. Some Senate Democrats, most prominently West Virginia’s Joe Manchin, have expressed support for a rate of 25 percent. Not a single Republican is willing to raise the corporate rate by even a single point.

As for the spending portion of the legislation, Biden said Wednesday, in an interview with Lawrence O’Donnell of MSNBC, that he was contemplating a deal to win Republican support for the physical infrastructure portion, between \$600 billion and \$800 billion, while enacting the remainder of the spending through the procedure known as “reconciliation,” which requires only a simple majority.

“I want to get a bipartisan deal on as much as we can get a bipartisan deal on—and that means roads, bridges, broadband, all infrastructure,” Biden said. “And then fight over what’s left and see if I can get it done without Republicans, if need be.”

The physical infrastructure would likely be financed through anticipated collections of unpaid taxes, based on an estimate that \$80 billion in additional funding for the Internal Revenue Service will collect \$700 billion to \$1 trillion from wealthy and corporate tax-dodgers, according to House Speaker Pelosi. “That’s a big chunk that would go a long way,” she said Thursday.

These comments indicate that the Democrats are open to passing a bipartisan infrastructure bill along the lines acceptable to the Republicans, paid for by only hypothetical tax increases. This would leave the bulk of the proposed spending—and all the real tax increases on the wealthy and big business—to the tender mercies of the most right-wing, pro-corporate Democrats like Manchin of West Virginia, who will either water down the plan even further or block it altogether.



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