

Biden endorses bipartisan infrastructure plan which guts initial proposal

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President Joe Biden announced on Thursday that he was endorsing an infrastructure plan put forward by a bipartisan group of senators that was a fraction of his original \$2.25 trillion proposal unveiled last March.

Standing outside the White House with a group of five Democrats and five Republicans, Biden said, “We have a deal” and then added “none of us got all that we wanted.” Biden got far less with the bipartisan plan proposing to spend about \$579 billion in new investments in roads, broadband internet, electric utilities and other projects, a drop in the bucket in comparison to the funding need to repair and update the country’s crumbling and neglected infrastructure.

Attempting the political equivalent of making a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, Biden said, “When we can find common ground, working across party lines, that is what I will seek to do,” adding that the deal was “a true bipartisan effort, breaking the ice that too often has kept us frozen in place.”

While the corporate media hailed the endorsement as a “major breakthrough,” the reality is that a commitment by the US government to any infrastructure spending plan is still far from a certainty. As the *New York Times* wrote, the bipartisan plan may not even “muster the support of at least 60 senators to overcome any filibuster” from Republicans, and the “two track strategy” of the Democrats—pursuing a larger funding bill through the process known as reconciliation at the same time—“promises to be a heavy lift.”

The \$579 billion in spending above expected federal levels in the bipartisan proposal would bring the investment in infrastructure to \$973 billion over five years and \$1.2 trillion if it is continued for eight years. According to a White House press statement, if adopted, the eight-year plan contains \$109 billion for

roads, bridges and major projects; \$73 billion for power infrastructure; \$66 billion for passenger and freight rail; \$65 billion for broadband access; \$49 billion for public transit; and \$25 billion for airports.

Republican opposition to tax increases to pay for the plan won out in the deal, with the cost of the spending covered by repurposing existing federal funds, public-private partnerships and revenue collected from enhanced enforcement at the Internal Revenue Service, sales from the strategic petroleum reserve and wireless-spectrum auction sales, among the other sources of revenue.

Biden’s original proposal called for a partial roll back of the corporate tax breaks—raising rates from 21 percent to 28 percent—put in place by the Trump administration in 2017.

Democrats such as Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut were reduced to complaining that bipartisan agreement was “way too small—paltry, pathetic. I need a clear, ironclad assurance that there will be a really adequate robust package” that will follow.

The president attempted to gloss over his surrender to the Republican Party agenda and right-wing Democrats such as Senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Mark Warner of Virginia by claiming there would be more added to the bill as it moved through the legislative process. He said, “If this is the only thing that comes to me, I’m not signing it.”

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi also claimed the Democrats would not support the bipartisan bill until the Senate presents a bill that is focused on Biden’s “human infrastructure” proposals—including funding for child care and tax credits for families. Pelosi added, “There won’t be an infrastructure bill unless we have a reconciliation bill. Plain and simple.”

That the Republicans are clearly driving the bus on Biden's infrastructure agenda was immediately revealed by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who attacked the Democrats' posturing, saying, "Less than two hours after publicly commending our colleagues and actually endorsing the bipartisan agreement, the president took the extraordinary step of threatening to veto it." From the Senate floor McConnell said on Thursday that Biden and Pelosi were issuing "an ultimatum on behalf of your left-wing base."

Vice President Kamala Harris attempted to paint the collapse of the 2021 Democratic Party legislative initiative in the name of "bipartisan compromise" as a victory. "This agreement signals to the world that we can function, deliver and do significant things," Harris said in a veiled reference to the January 6 assault on the US Capitol by a fascist-led mob organized by leaders of the Republican Party and the Trump White House in an effort to overturn the election.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), the current condition of the backbone of American society earns a grade point average of a D+ or a rating of "poor, at risk," based on an evaluation of eighteen different categories of infrastructure. The ASCE report card states, "A large portion of the system exhibits significant deterioration. Condition and capacity are of serious concern with strong risk of failure."

The disastrous state of the US infrastructure is one manifestation of the decline of American capitalism since its emergence after World War II as the dominant industrial, financial and military power internationally. A study performed in 2018 called "Economic Impact of Infrastructure Investment," by Jeffrey M. Stupak, revealed that infrastructure investment by federal, state and local governments in the US peaked in the 1930s at 4.2 percent of GDP and has fallen since then to 1.5 percent.

The study also pointed out that the US lags behind many other developed countries with respect to annual infrastructure spending, with all G7 countries with the exception of Italy and Germany spending more each year as a share of their economy than the US. Stupak also argued that while infrastructure is often thought of as roads, railways, airports and utilities, it also includes things such as hospitals, schools and other public

buildings.

The decades of malign neglect by the US ruling establishment in relationship to these critical elements of modern society emerged in stark relief over the past year during the COVID-19 pandemic as more than 600,000 Americans perished from the disease in the wealthiest country in the world. The world is right now witnessing a further example of the crisis in the US, as a 12-story oceanfront condominium building in Surfside, Florida has collapsed, with at least 99 people currently unaccounted for.

As the financial resources of society have been funneled into the hands of a small layer of millionaires and billionaires, the essential infrastructure that hundreds of millions depend upon has been starved of resources and transformed into more and more of a public danger.

The Democrats and Republicans have both overseen this process of wealth transfer through a combination of budget cuts and reductions in regulation, health and safety inspection and enforcement. Subordinating everything in society to the drive for profit and the accumulation of share values on Wall Street, the ruling establishment has combined the assault on infrastructure with a reduction in the wages, benefits and working conditions of the working class.



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