

# Right-wing Democrats dictate cuts in Biden social policy

**Patrick Martin**  
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The Biden administration has responded to pressure from a right-wing minority among House and Senate Democrats by slashing its proposed social spending increase nearly in half.

Biden delivered the news to a closed-door meeting of the House Democratic caucus Friday afternoon, telling them the overall cost of the reconciliation bill would come down from the \$3.5 trillion proposed by the White House to between \$1.9 trillion and \$2.3 trillion, far closer to the \$1.5 trillion ceiling backed by West Virginia Democratic Senator Joe Manchin.

Manchin and Arizona Democratic Senator Kyrsten Sinema have opposed passage of the social spending legislation by means of the reconciliation procedure, which allows the Democrats to bypass a Republican filibuster in the closely divided Senate. The procedure can only be used on a spending bill, and only once in a fiscal year.

The House Progressive Caucus, which comprises nearly half the 220 Democrats in the House of Representatives, has blocked passage of the bipartisan infrastructure bill, approved in August by the Senate, until the two right-wing Senate Democrats reach agreement with the White House on the reconciliation package.

Their opposition forced House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to push back a planned September 27 vote on the infrastructure bill, agreed to with another small right-wing faction of Democrats in the House, first until October 1, and then until October 31, a decision she announced in a letter made public Saturday.

Biden made his in-person visit to the Capitol, his first since delivering a nationally televised address last April, to discuss the deadlock with the Democratic caucus. He brought something for both factions: a fig-leaf concession on procedure to the “progressives” and a near-total victory on substance to the right-wing.

Biden endorsed Pelosi’s delay in the infrastructure vote, despite grumbling from some of the House right-wingers, explaining that it was necessary to reach a deal with Manchin and Sinema on the reconciliation bill so the two pieces of legislation could be passed “in tandem.” But he

went much more than halfway towards Manchin on substance, giving him an effective veto over the top-line number.

This cave-in to a small minority—two out of 50 Democrats in the Senate, eight out of 220 in the House—cannot be explained by parliamentary arithmetic in a closely divided Congress. The power of Manchin, Sinema and their counterparts in the House is explained by their voicing most clearly the demands of corporate America, particularly in their opposition to tax increases on the wealthy and big business, as well as any significant expansion of the social safety net.

The decision by the White House to accept a much lower price tag for the social spending bill now sets in motion a Hunger Games-style competition between the various social programs that were components of the reconciliation bill: making the child tax credit permanent; adding vision, hearing and dental care to Medicare; expanding Medicaid in states where Republican governors have blocked it; providing paid home health care for the elderly; expanding Head Start through universal pre-kindergarten for three- and four-year-olds; one week of paid family and medical leave; initiating a policy of free tuition for community colleges; and spending on a number of programs to combat climate change.

There is reportedly now debate in the White House and among congressional Democrats involving whether to fully fund some of these programs and eliminate others, or to fund some of the programs for less than the full 10 years provided in the original bill, or some combination of the two methods. Manchin has proposed means-testing some of the programs, although this is supposedly not under consideration.

“The whole shrinking of the pie pits Medicare recipients against poor families against home care workers against victims of climate change,” Faiz Shakir, former campaign manager for Bernie Sanders, told the *Washington Post*. “It makes the working class of America fight over the scraps.”

Shakir’s former boss, however, was enthusiastic about Biden’s intervention and praised it to the skies in several

appearances on the Sunday television interview programs. Interviewed on “Meet the Press” on NBC in his capacity as chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, Senator Sanders said that he did not believe Biden had given any specific number in his remarks to the House Democrats.

“What he said is there’s going to have to be give and take on both sides,” Sanders said. “I’m not clear that he did bring forth a specific number. But what the president also said, and what all of us are saying, is that maybe the time is now for us to stand up to powerful special interests who are currently spending hundreds of millions of dollars trying to prevent us from doing what the American people want.”

On the ABC program “This Week” Sanders said, “Three and a half trillion should be a minimum, but I accept that there’s gonna have to be give and take.” He then went on to make an extraordinary tribute to the Democratic leadership, headed by Biden: “We are not just taking on or dealing with Senators Manchin or Senator Sinema. We’re taking on the entire ruling class of this country. Right now the drug companies, the health care—the health insurance companies, the fossil fuel industry are spending hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to prevent us from doing what the American people want. And this really is a test of whether or not American democracy can work.”

One would think that the red flag had been raised above the White House! Joe Biden was a six-term senator who protected the interests of the credit card industry and the corporations headquartered in Delaware, while Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer has long been known as the “Senator from Wall Street” for his close ties to the stock exchange and major banks. To claim that they are “taking on the entire ruling class” is to lie without scruple or remorse.

The former co-chair of the Sanders campaign, Representative Ro Khanna of California, was equally effusive in his embrace of Biden. Appearing on “Fox News Sunday,” he said he relied on the White House to sort out which social policy proposals would survive the reduction from \$3.5 trillion to \$2 trillion or even less. “Ultimately the president is an honest broker,” he said. “He’s going to bring all of the stakeholders together. And I trust his judgment to get a compromise.”

Asked whether blocking the infrastructure bill constituted opposition to the White House, he replied, “I would not have contradicted the president’s vision. What I have said—consistently what most progressives have said is we want to do what the president wants.”

Perhaps the most abject display came from Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), who told CBS that the Democrats were already beginning to sort out how to implement the cuts in proposed social spending needed to

meet the demands of senators Manchin and Sinema. “I think it’s unfortunate that we have to compromise with ourselves for an ambitious agenda for working people,” she said, then urged people to “reach out to their elected officials to let them know what programs they want to make sure are kept.”

Asked about her statement last year that in any other country she and Biden would be in different parties, she said, “I think that President Biden has been a good faith partner to the entire Democratic Party. He is in fact a moderate and we disagree on certain issues. But he reaches out and he actually tries to understand our perspective, and that is why I am fighting for his agenda with the Build Back Better Act.”

The contempt with which the real powers in the Democratic Party regard their left-talking colleagues was expressed in another comment on “Meet the Press,” by Jeh Johnson, former secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in the Obama administration, the enforcer of mass deportations and counter-terrorism policies.

Host Chuck Todd asked him about the headline on the Democratic Party crisis in Sunday’s edition of the *New York Times*, “Biden Throws In With Left, Leaving His Agenda in Doubt.” Johnson dismissed the newspaper’s claim that Biden siding with the progressives. “Let’s not forget that the bill the progressives are pushing for is Biden’s bill,” he said. “It’s his domestic agenda.”

Johnson continued, “It’s not as if it’s some wild-eyed far-left socialist piece of legislation. This is Joe Biden’s Build Back Better domestic agenda. And the progressives are carrying his water on Capitol Hill and appear to be doing it rather effectively right now.”

Water boys (and girls) for Biden and the Democratic Party: A fitting political epitaph for Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and their DSA and pseudo-left cheerleaders.



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