

Biden in Michigan: Infrastructure, social spending bills vital for waging economic warfare vs. China

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Having capitulated to demands from the most right-wing lawmakers in the Democratic Senate and House caucuses to drastically slash his “Build Back Better” social welfare and climate bill, President Joe Biden on Tuesday traveled to Howell, Michigan to promote his domestic economic agenda.

The day before, Biden met with House “progressives” to reaffirm their acceptance of a reduction in the price tag of his social spending bill from \$3.5 trillion over 10 years to something in the range of \$1.9 trillion to \$2.2 trillion, depending on the agreement of West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin and Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema to move beyond Manchin’s stated target of \$1.5 trillion.

Biden reportedly told the “progressives” that he could support Manchin’s demand for many of the social measures in his bill to be means-tested, along with proposals to reduce the length of the programs to less than 10 years, creating the conditions for any programs enacted to be terminated once the Republicans regain control of Congress or the White House.

On Tuesday morning, before flying to Michigan, Biden met with so-called “moderate” Democrats to reassure them of his commitment to pass the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, also over 10 years, passed by the Senate in August with the support of 19 Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Biden is seeking to bridge differences within the Democratic Party between a majority of House members, who insist on agreement by the Senate Democratic holdouts on the larger, although much reduced, social spending bill before House passage of the bipartisan infrastructure bill, and a minority that wants to pass the infrastructure bill now.

This squabbling within the Democratic Party takes place within the context of a massive lobbying campaign by the banks, the pharmaceutical industry, big oil and other corporate interests that reject any increase in taxes or extension of social welfare programs. According to the

watchdog group “Open Secrets,” more than 4,000 lobbyists are working on budget and spending issues, and 10 major industries have already spent nearly \$700 million this year on lobbying.

This was the context for Biden’s speech Tuesday in Howell. The selection of the town some 55 miles west of Detroit was itself significant. Howell itself, and Livingston County, voted heavily for Trump in both 2016 and 2020. However, Democrat Elissa Slotkin was elected to Congress in that district, which also includes the city of Lansing, in 2018 and was reelected in 2020. She is considered among the vulnerable Democratic incumbents in the 2022 mid-term election, which could well see the Democrats lose their narrow margins in both houses of Congress.

Slotkin is among the most prominent of 11 former intelligence and military operatives from the CIA, Pentagon, National Security Council and State Department elected as freshmen Democratic House members in 2018.

A former CIA operative with three tours in Iraq, who worked as Iraq director for the National Security Council in the Obama White House and as a top aide to John Negroponte, the first director of national intelligence, Slotkin followed her deep involvement in US war crimes in Iraq by moving to the Pentagon. There, as a principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, her areas of responsibility included drone warfare, “homeland defense” and cyber warfare.

Biden not only promoted Slotkin at the Howell event, allowing her to speak prior to his remarks, he made a point of her CIA résumé, saying, “Elissa Slotkin, you don’t want to screw around with her. (Laughter.) She’s an intelligence officer as well, so she’s forgotten more than most of you know. But thanks for riding out with me, and thanks for the advice you’ve given me.” In her own remarks, Slotkin promoted the bipartisan infrastructure bill and made no mention of the social welfare/climate budget bill, which she has yet to endorse.

This set the tone for Biden's pitch, which framed the push for his economic agenda as an existential struggle to halt America's global geo-political decline and counter the rise of China. Speaking at the training center of Operating Engineers Local 324, Biden doubled down on his calls for national unity and bipartisanship as essential to a corporate-state strategy, utilizing the services of the trade union bureaucracy to suppress working class opposition and wage economic warfare against the Chinese threat.

Declaring that America was "at an inflection point," Biden compared US economic domination in the 20th century with the trajectory of decline and decay in the 21st.

"Our infrastructure used to be the best in the world," he declared. "Today, according to the World Economic Forum, we rank 13th. Our infrastructure—12 nations have a better infrastructure than we do, which means they can move product, they can do so many things better than we can do it.

"We're among the first in the world to guarantee access to universal education. Now, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development ranks America 35th out of 37 major countries when it comes to investing in early childhood education as a percent of GDP...

"I don't know what's happened. The world has taken notice, by the way, including our adversaries. And now they're closing the gap in a big way."

Asserting that his bills were "not about left versus right or moderate versus progressive or anything that pits Americans against one another," he said, "They're about competitiveness versus decay. They're about leading the world or continuing to let the world pass us by, which is literally happening."

On this nationalist basis, he quickly pivoted to the central threat—China.

"Now, let me tell you, our competitors aren't hanging around and waiting to see what we're going to do. They've been pouring billions of dollars into infrastructure and into training their people for years now.

"Take China, for example... In recent years, China has spent around three times as much on infrastructure as a share of their economy than we have. Three times. And they're not slowing down.

"Yesterday, my US trade representative delivered an important speech on our competition with China. She pointed out that China made a major investment in steel plants beginning about 20 years ago. And in the last 20 years, half of America's steel companies have been shuttered...

"China now produces more steel in one month than America does in an entire year. You can see it in sector after sector: Other countries are speeding up and America is falling behind."

Turning to the race for control of the global electric vehicle market, Biden praised the partnership between the United Auto Workers union and the US-based car makers, but warned:

"But guess what? China is not waiting around. They've manufactured more than twice as many electric vehicles as we have over the last decade. They control more than 75 percent of the battery market. And they're poised to invest another \$14 billion in charging capacity now in their country."

Biden turned to his "Build Back Better" social welfare bill and cited figures on the drastic decline in US investment in education as compared to other major industrial countries.

As in previous speeches on his supposedly pro-worker economic program, Biden made a point of his support for capitalism, combining it with a plea for the billionaires to "pay your fair share."

"I'm a capitalist. I think you should be able to go out and make a million dollars, or a billion. But just pay your fair share," he said.

There is nothing remotely pro-worker or progressive about the aggressive, nationalist and war-mongering policy outlined by Biden in Michigan. In the course of his remarks, Biden spoke of "my friends on the other team," i.e., the Republican Party that backed Trump's conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election, culminating in the January 6 attempted coup. Biden's "friends" continue to back Trump's efforts to build a fascist movement and establish a dictatorship, while the Democrats continue to cover up the ongoing conspiracy.

The gutting of his own social spending bill testifies to the impossibility of social reform within the framework of the capitalist system. The real target of Biden's corporatist policy is the working class, whose mounting resistance he hopes to suppress by means of the pro-corporate trade unions, and divert outward against an external "enemy"—China.



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