

West Virginia Senator Manchin kills Biden's already stripped-down "Build Back Better" legislation

Jacob Crosse
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In a debacle for President Joe Biden, the Democratic Party and their pseudo-left appendages, Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia announced he “cannot vote to continue with” the “Build Back Better” (BBB) legislation, effectively killing Biden’s signature 10-year, \$1.75 trillion social, climate and tax bill.

That Manchin chose to make the statement appearing on Fox News, the semi-official network of the Republican right, only underscored the flagrantly right-wing character of his action. The Democratic senator deliberately torpedoed an agreement with the Biden White House to move ahead with the vote on the social spending bill if “progressive” Democrats in the House of Representative lifted their blockade on the infrastructure legislation, which was enacted by Congress last month and signed into law by Biden.

His appearance on Fox signaled that if there is any political retaliation against him for blocking the bill, Manchin will simply cross the aisle and join the Republican Party, making Mitch McConnell the majority leader for at least the next year, and potentially for the rest of Biden’s term in office.

Manchin told his host on Fox News Sunday, Bret Baier: “I cannot vote to continue with this piece of legislation. I just can’t. I’ve tried everything humanly possible. I can’t get there.” Baier followed up: “You’re done? This is—is this a no?”

“This is a no on this legislation. I have tried everything I know to do,” replied Manchin. In a follow-up statement released by his Senate office, he claimed his “concerns have only increased as the pandemic surges on, inflation rises and geopolitical uncertainty increases around the world.”

Manchin’s real concerns, however, are suggested by his personal wealth, founded largely on the coal industry, and by the report in the *Guardian* last month that he “had taken more than \$1.5 million ... from corporate interests opposed to the Build Back Better plan as of September.”

He echoed Republican talking points that the limited bill,

with modest improvements in social benefits, including the child tax credit, four weeks of paid family leave and the expansion of Medicare to include hearing aids, as a “socialist takeover” of the US government. Manchin added: “My Democratic colleagues in Washington are determined to dramatically reshape our society in a way that leaves our country even more vulnerable to the threats we face. I cannot take that risk with a staggering debt of more than \$29 trillion.”

Manchin’s self-professed concern about the “debt” has yet to manifest itself when it comes to voting for the US war machine. Since being elected to the Senate in 2010, Manchin has voted “yes” for 11 yearly defense appropriations bill, totaling over \$9.8 trillion in just over a decade.

Manchin’s announcement comes three days after Biden released a statement claiming Manchin had “reiterated his support for Build Back Better funding” and that Biden and his team would have “ongoing discussion with Senator Manchin; that work will continue next week.”

However, in response to Manchin’s opposition to the bill, on Sunday White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki released a statement denouncing Manchin for allegedly reversing his position on the legislation while admitting that nothing would be done this year, as the administration forgoes an opportunity to use the reconciliation process this year to pass legislation by a simple majority, requiring no Republican support.

“On Tuesday of this week, Senator Manchin came to the White House and submitted—to the president, in person, directly—a written outline for a Build Back Better bill that was the same size and scope as the president’s framework, and covered many of the same priorities.

“While that framework was missing key priorities, we believe it could lead to a compromise acceptable to all. If his comments on Fox and written statement indicate an end to that effort, they represent a sudden and inexplicable reversal in his position, and a breach of his commitments to the

president and the senator's colleagues in the House and Senate."

Psaki continued, "Just as Senator Manchin reversed his position on Build Back Better this morning, we will continue to press him to see if he will reverse his position yet again, to honor his prior commitments and be true to his word."

The ignominious collapse of the legislation was months in the making. Since the beginning of the year, Manchin, along with former Green Party member, current Democratic Senator of Arizona Krysten Sinema, have voiced their opposition to nearly all of the limited reform measures offered by the Democratic leadership, whether it was BBB, voting rights or eliminating the filibuster.

Their joint opposition to BBB has been a lucrative endeavor for the pair. In July, the *Texas Tribune* reported that Manchin held a major fundraiser over the summer in Dallas, Texas, that attracted "several wealthy Republican donors." Similarly, the *New York Times* reported in November that Sinema attended the same fundraiser with Manchin, and has received several donations from Republican billionaire mega-donors.

In a bid to appease Manchin, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and his fellow "progressives" in the House oversaw the evisceration of the BBB bill from the original \$6 trillion top-line figure, to \$3.5 trillion, then \$1.75 trillion, and now to nothing.

Previous versions of the bill included limited reformist measures, such as two years of community college, 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave and an expansion of Medicare to provide dental, vision and hearing coverage. Even after these modest proposals were slashed to virtually nothing or removed outright from the bill, while generous tax cuts to the rich and major industries were maintained, Biden, Sanders and the Democrats continued to tout the alleged "transformative" character of the legislation and the supposed benefits it would bring to working people.

Over 100 members of the Democrats' House Progressive Caucus had previously claimed that they would "link" BBB with the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill in order to ensure the passage of both. However, after the intervention of Biden, these "progressives" changed their tune and voted to pass the infrastructure bill, which had the support of Wall Street and corporate lobbyists, separately, thus giving up their leverage. They accepted assurances from Biden that he would ensure that Manchin and Sinema would support the social spending measure, which would need to pass using the reconciliation process, which only requires 50 votes, with Vice President Kamala Harris serving as the tie-breaker.

However, after the infrastructure bill passed the House and the Senate with limited Republican support, the BBB bill has

languished in the Senate for weeks without a vote, with Manchin and Sinema refusing to declare their support. With Congress adjourning earlier this week for the rest of the year, Manchin's declaration has effectively blocked any plans to vote on the legislation in January.

Even though millions of voters elected Democrats to deliver on their campaign promises of social reform and "following the science" to end the pandemic, one year of Democratic rule has disabused those notions as over 1,300 people continue to succumb to the virus every day, while all of the Democrats' key campaign promises, from a \$15 minimum wage, to free college, expanded Medicare, immigrant reform and erasing college loan debt remain unfulfilled.

Standing exposed as liars are all the pseudo-left forces who advocated a vote for Democrats as a way of "providing space" for social reform. This includes the Democratic Socialists of America and their congressional members, like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, who admitted on Twitter Sunday, referring to Manchin's backstabbing, that "we knew he would do this months ago."

The collapse of the BBB is only the latest confirmation that the Democratic Party is not a vehicle for social reform, but in fact a graveyard. While "centrist" Democrats like Manchin and Sinema march to the tune of their Republican billionaire backers, Sanders and the rest of the "progressives" provide a veneer of "reform" while selling the fiction to their supporters that this party is capable of reform.

The fact is the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are servants of Wall Street. They are beholden to the same banks, corporations, military and intelligence agencies as their increasingly fascist "Republican colleagues." There is no reforming the Democrats, just as there is no reforming the capitalist system. It needs to be overthrown through independent political mobilization of the working class on a socialist program, which can guarantee that the resources of society are not squandered on a parasitic few, but used for the betterment and enrichment of all.



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