

Senator Manchin forgoes 2024 reelection bid, considers “centrist” third-party presidential run based on austerity and war

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On Thursday, West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin released a video announcement that he will not run next year for a third full term as US senator, having been first elected in a 2010 special election following the death of long-time coal state senator Robert Byrd.

Manchin, a right-wing multi-millionaire coal investor and mouthpiece for the fossil fuel industry, was considered the only candidate who might be able to hold onto the West Virginia seat for the Democrats in the narrowly divided chamber, where the Democrats currently maintain control by two votes, including those of three independents (Bernie Sanders, Kyrsten Sinema and Angus King) who caucus with them.

Even Manchin’s chances were considered problematic in a state that has swung sharply to the Republicans after years of mine closures and economic devastation under successive Democratic administrations. Trump took West Virginia by nearly 40 points in 2020, and his endorsed candidate, current Governor Jim Justice, himself a former Democrat, is considered the frontrunner in the 2024 Senate race. Overall, Democrats are defending 23 Senate seats compared to just 10 for Republicans.

Beyond control of the Senate, Manchin’s move is aimed at either moving Joe Biden’s reelection campaign even further to the right—particularly on social cuts, regulation of coal and other fossil fuels, deregulation of business more broadly, and democratic issues such as abortion access and migrants’ rights—or aiding the Republican candidate by drawing Democratic voters away from Biden through a “bipartisan” third-party effort.

In the video released Thursday, Manchin said, “I will not be running for re-election to the United States

Senate, but what I will be doing is traveling the country and speaking out to see if there is an interest in creating a movement to mobilize the middle and bring Americans together.”

Attempting to strike a presidential pose, the mining industry shill quoted JFK’s famous inaugural phrase about asking “what you can do for your country” and lobbed clichés about “putting country before party, working across the aisle and finding common ground.” Listing what he called the central challenges before the country, he cited “a border crisis, with illegal drugs entering our country and killing Americans every day,” a national debt that is “out of control,” unsafe communities, and the need to provide “critical aid to two of our allies fighting wars for their survival.”

Manchin sought to take into account growing popular opposition to the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the outpouring of shock and horror over Israeli genocide in Gaza and Washington’s full support for it, citing the need to “prevent being pulled into a major war ourselves.”

Manchin is positioning himself for a possible presidential run as the candidate of the so-called “No Labels” group. A coalition of anti-Trump Republicans and right-wing Democrats, funded mostly by Republican corporate donors, No Labels held an event last July in New Hampshire, the site of the first presidential primary in January, at which it released its “common sense” platform. The 30-point document on the “politics of problem solving” seeks to bridge partisan divides by rhetorically acknowledging both sides of every question.

Thus, it couples support for a domestic renewable energy industry with strident opposition to restrictions

on domestic fossil fuel production. It demands an end to the release of undocumented migrants into the US, while calling for broader legal immigration channels and a path to citizenship to those brought to the US as children. It says women have a right to control their reproductive health, but that this right must be balanced by an obligation to safeguard human life.

Most significantly, it calls out both Biden and Trump by name for pledging not to cut Social Security benefits, arguing that cuts must be imposed on retirees to prevent the program from going bankrupt—ignoring, of course, the staggering levels of wealth inequality in the US, e.g., the fact that the three richest Americans hold more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of the population.

The main speakers at the No Labels event in July were Manchin and Jon Huntsman Jr., the former Republican governor of Utah.

No Labels has thus far acquired ballot status in 12 states, and aims to get on the ballot in 27 states this year. It plans a nominating convention in April in Dallas, but says it will only move forward if there is a clear path to victory and a minimal chance of helping Trump get reelected.

Following Manchin's video announcement Thursday, the group issued a statement commending him for "stepping up to lead a long overdue national conversation about solving America's biggest challenges, including inflation, an insecure border, out-of-control debt and growing threats from abroad."

In a statement Thursday evening, Biden praised Manchin's record "in a political career of more than 40 years" and said he looked "forward to continuing our work together to get things done for the American people." Biden cited Manchin's role in securing passage of his Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and his Inflation Reduction Act. The former is an economic nationalist measure directed centrally at preparing the US economic and technological base for an escalation of the unfolding imperialist world war to new fronts, including Iran and, above all, China.

Modest proposals for social reforms in the latter bill—including free community college; extended and expanded child tax credits; universal pre-kindergarten; paid sick and family care leave; Medicare expansion to cover dental, vision and hearing; tax increases on the rich—were all blocked by Manchin and Sinema, who

withheld their votes and blocked passage until Biden removed them from the bill.

On the bill's climate provisions, Manchin, who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and receives more campaign dollars from the fossil fuel industry than any other senator, crippled all proposed restrictions on industry. Instead, he obtained the insertion of provisions massively expanding exploration and drilling for oil and gas on federal lands and in offshore regions, including both the Gulf of Mexico and the waters off of Alaska, leading Brett Hartl, government affairs director at the Center for Biological Diversity, to call the bill a "climate suicide pact."

Manchin and Sinema also blocked a Democratic Party proposal to lift the Senate filibuster rule, which requires that 60 of the chamber's 100 members agree on most legislation, so as to pass bills protecting abortion rights following the Supreme Court's ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Democratic opponents of No Labels point out that a number of the group's major donors, such as Woody Hunt, senior chairman of Hunt Companies, John Catsimatidis, head of Gristedes Foods, and Ted Kellner, a Milwaukee businessman, have given lavishly to Republicans, including Trump.

Through it all, Manchin has done extraordinarily well for himself. According to *Forbes*, his net worth is \$30 million, nearly triple what it was just five years ago. He has an annual income of \$6 million and \$8.1 million cash in the bank. He owns 12 luxury cars, including an Aston Martin DB11 valued at \$360,000. He also owns seven luxury mansions. He continues to make \$500,000 every year in salary from the coal brokerage company Enersystems, which he co-founded and at one time headed as president.



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