

Biden promotes pro-corporate, bipartisan infrastructure plan in Wisconsin speech

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On Tuesday, President Joe Biden gave a speech in La Crosse, Wisconsin, to promote the stripped-down, bipartisan infrastructure plan negotiated last week by a group of five Republican senators and five of the most right-wing members of the Democratic Senate caucus.

The proposal, said by the White House to be worth \$1.2 trillion over eight years, actually calls for only \$579 billion in new funding beyond monies previously penciled in to address the disastrous decay of basic physical infrastructure in the US. The plan, which Biden endorsed at a White House event last Thursday, flanked by the 10 Senate negotiators, is less than half the size of the infrastructure proposal he unveiled in March.

Moreover, it excludes a series of “human infrastructure” measures and promised tax increases on corporations and the rich that are opposed by the Republicans and sections of Democratic lawmakers.

The announced Biden–Democratic strategy is to obtain Senate passage of the narrow infrastructure bill, to which 11 Republican senators have signed on, through the normal legislative process in the Senate, which will require 10 Republican votes to overcome a filibuster.

A separate bill on social programs to be paid for in part by tax hikes on the wealthy is, according to the White House and congressional Democrats, to be passed using the budget reconciliation process, which will require only a majority vote in the evenly divided Senate, with Vice President Kamala Harris casting the deciding vote.

Neither the infrastructure plan, which Biden has dubbed the “American Jobs Plan,” nor the collection of social measures, titled the “American Families Plan,” has actually been drawn up in the form of legislation, and there is no certainty of either being passed by Congress.

Clearly, both Biden and Wall Street are far more interested in enacting the bill on bridges, roads, broadband, electrical transmission, rail and mass transit, water, electric vehicle support and other aspects of infrastructure than legislating even the most modest social improvements, especially if the latter entail a tax increase, no matter how slight, on the

corporate elite.

In endorsing the bipartisan infrastructure plan last Thursday, which was based on an acceptance of the demands of the Republicans and right-wing Democrats such as Joe Manchin, Kyrsten Sinema and Mark Warner, Biden and the pro-Democratic media hailed it as breakthrough in the struggle against China for dominance in the 21st century. It proved, the White House declared, that “democracies” can function and compete with “autocracies” such as China.

Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, a multimillionaire former telecommunications CEO who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee and has led the charge for Internet censorship, put the matter bluntly following the announcement of the infrastructure deal: “The message it sends to the American people, and also to our friends and adversaries around the world, is so important. In a post-January 6 world, it shows that people who come from different political views can still come together on national priorities.”

Beginning to address the decades of malign neglect of basic infrastructure is seen as critical in strengthening the home front in order to conduct economic warfare and prepare for potential military conflict against China.

At the same time, the plan represents a massive windfall for corporate contractors, who will be given lucrative contracts in the name of a “public–private partnership.”

That said, the plan is a drop in the bucket compared to the scale of investment required to reverse decades in which the US government has singled-mindedly pursued ever-greater enrichment of the corporate–financial oligarchy. It has done so by conducting war against the working class, slashing taxes for the rich, dismantling large sections of industry, gutting business regulations and worker safety rules, slashing funding for research and development, and pumping up the stock market as the mechanism for a vast redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top.

Biden’s speech unfolded against tragic evidence of the human cost of this process: the collapse of the Surfside, Florida, condominium, alongside the mass flooding in

Detroit, a record breaking heatwave in the Pacific Northwest and the ongoing toll in needless death—officially at more than 600,000 in the US and climbing—from the COVID-19 pandemic and the homicidal herd immunity response of first the Trump and now the Biden administration. The coronavirus crisis immediately revealed the consequences of the criminal starving of the health care system and other basic social infrastructure.

In his Wisconsin speech, Biden called his program a “blue collar blueprint to rebuild America.” He said this while supporting the early cutoff of federal unemployment benefits, for the most part in Republican-controlled states to date, that is aimed at forcing workers back into unsafe jobs, even as the more virulent Delta variant spreads across the country. In fact, \$25 billion in funding for the infrastructure plan is to come from unused pandemic-related federal jobless benefits.

A major purpose of Tuesday’s speech was to reassure the ruling class that Biden had no intention of vetoing the infrastructure bill should it pass the Senate and the American Families Plan fails to be passed as well. Speaking to reporters last Thursday some two hours after the announcement of the infrastructure deal, Biden indicated that he would only sign the two bills “in tandem.” That immediately produced denunciations not only by Republican lawmakers, but also by “moderate” Democrats and Democratic-aligned newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

On Saturday, Biden issued an abject statement profusely apologizing for implying any hesitancy in signing a bill based on the bipartisan infrastructure deal, regardless of the fate of the other legislation. It was widely reported that the statement was drafted by his chief counselor, long-time Democratic operative and corporate lobbyist Steven Ricchetti.

The statement directly called out Democrats who were threatening to torpedo the infrastructure measure if the plan for corporate and capital gains tax increases, an extension of the child tax credit and earned income tax credit, expanded Medicare coverage, free community college tuition, and other social measures failed to pass the Senate.

Tuesday’s appearance was meant to clear up any remaining confusion. It was dominated by the economic nationalist and corporatist framework of the Biden administration. The dais featured the slogans “A Future Made in America” and “American Jobs Plan.”

Biden began by reiterating his inauguration day pledge to “bring America together.” He placed the improvement in physical infrastructure within the context of the struggle against China, warning that “China is way out in front in terms of infrastructure.”

He then gave examples of the disastrous decay of US infrastructure, without providing any explanation of why this was so or who was responsible. Nor did he mention the pandemic or the Surfside condo disaster.

Among the issues he cited:

? One in every five miles of US roads is in poor condition.

? Fifty percent of bridges are over 50 years old. The 10 most traveled bridges in the country are in need of repair.

? More than 1 million homes are served water through lead pipes.

? Energy grids are aging, some are over a century old. (He noted the collapse of the entire energy system in Texas last winter.)

? The US has fallen to eighth in the world in research and development investment. China has climbed to second place.

Even Biden’s very partial description of the deterioration of US infrastructure made clear the hopeless inadequacy of the plan he was promoting, leaving aside his omission of the decay of health care, schools and housing.

The total investment of \$1.2 trillion over eight years comes to an annual allotment of \$144.8 billion. That is less than the combined wealth increase—over \$150 billion—enjoyed by the world’s two richest people—Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk—in the pandemic year of 2020.

Furthermore, the figure of \$1.2 trillion over eight years precisely equals the estimated increase in the wealth of US billionaires during the pandemic, as of the end of April 2021.

Biden is proposing a record military budget of \$753 billion for the fiscal year beginning October 1. That is more than five times the annual investment in infrastructure proposed in the bipartisan plan.

Toward the end of his 30-minute speech, Biden pivoted to his American Families Plan proposal. In doing so, he went out of his way to reassure the financial oligarchs that they had nothing to fear from his call for them to pay their “fair share.”

In defense of his proposal to partially reverse the Trump tax windfall for the rich passed in 2017 by hiking the corporate tax rate from 21 percent to 28 percent (still well below the previous rate of 35 percent), he noted that 30 Forbes 500 corporations paid zero taxes in 2020.

This was immediately followed by: “I’m not trying to punish anybody. ... I think you should be able to be a billionaire.”



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