

Biden's Legislation Whittled Down by "Moderate" Democrats, Progressives Trapped

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Four months ago, President Joseph Biden put forward a proposal for a two-part \$4.1 trillion-dollar legislative proposal that included both \$2.3 trillion for infrastructure investment and \$1.8 trillion to aid American families. The program was larger than both Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, the most expensive and far-reaching reform legislation in American history with many new elements such as clean energy proposals, paid family and medical leave, free universal pre-school and two years free education at a public community college.

"It's about a country once again that inspires and leads the world in the opportunities we provide, the technology we discover, the technologies we pioneer and the industries we create. And the nation that lead the world in combating the existential threat of climate change," said Biden in July. He also argued that his plan would "put us in a position to win the global competition with China in the upcoming years."

The real forces driving Biden's proposals were America's continuing crises of both health and the economy and the impetus given to demands for reform by social movements such as Occupy Wall Street in 2011, the enormous Black Lives Matter protests against racism and police violence in 2020, and Bernie Sanders' two campaigns for the presidency in 2016 and 2020 where he made many of the proposals subsequently taken up by Biden.

While Republicans generally supported the infrastructure bill, they unanimously opposed all of the social programs. Democrats would need all 50 votes in the Senate, plus the vote of the presiding vice-president Kamal Harris, and nearly all votes in the House of Representatives to pass Biden's legislation. But in the last several weeks, two so-called moderate Democratic Senators have been able to force Biden to cut his proposal to less than half the original amount, eliminating many of the innovative social programs.

Biden originally proposed to pay for his enormous spending bill by raising the corporate tax rate from 21 to 28 percent, partially restoring the taxes that been cut by President Donald Trump from 35 percent to 21 percent. The Republicans, of course, rejected the tax hike, but so too did the Democrats' "moderates," arguing that the party should find other sources of revenue.

The two senators who have paralyzed Biden's legislative agenda are not moderates, but actually conservatives whose views are more in line with the Republican Party. Senator Joe Manchin represents West Virginia, a state known for its coal mines. Manchin himself receives \$500,000 a year in dividends from coal company stock, putting his own interests at odds with his party's clean energy program. Democratic Senator Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, once a leftist Green Party activist, did a complete flip, becoming a voice for business. She has received almost a million dollars in campaign contributions from groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable, the National Association of Manufacturers. These two senators have been able to hold the Democratic Party hostage and force Biden to back down.

Consequently, Biden has been forced to reduce his plan to \$1.7 trillion—less than half of the original proposal—and to throw out many progressive programs. Free community college will be eliminated. Paid family leave, originally proposed for 12 weeks, was reduced to four, and it now seems that it will be cut it altogether. Dental and vision care will reportedly be removed from the Medicare plan. The corporate tax rate will not be raised.

The progressives in Congress, including a few members of the Democratic Socialists of America, have fought for a better bill, but in the end, they will have little choice but to accept whatever deal Biden and the Democratic Party leaders agree to. While this may still be the biggest such reform package in American history, it is a disappointment for working people.