

Manchin: Guarding the Henhouse

In a capitalist system, everything is for sale. Our government “**of and for the people**”, is no exception. The purchase of one senator within the ‘majority party’ can assure your business, no matter how destructive, dangerous or unpopular, can go on without regulation. The current budget fight offers up a perfect opportunity for those industries to call in their favors.

President Biden’s budget plan contains a sweeping and ambitious’ plan to convert 80% of the energy grid to renewable resources by 2030 and 100% by 2035. The plan would replace the aging power grid with wind, solar and nuclear power. The idea of ‘**renewable**’ nuclear power escapes me since the spent fuel that has to be stored, well, forever.

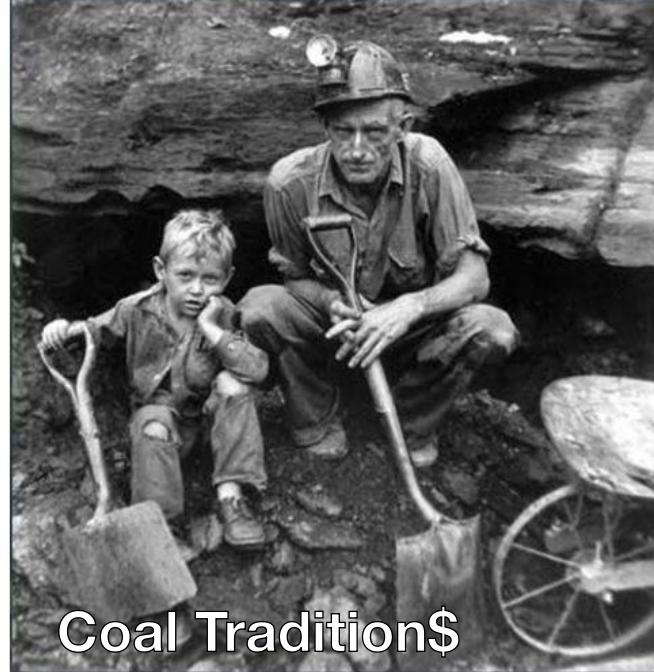
Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia, Senate Energy Committee Chair, has been tapped to write this plan in the reconciliation bill for the budget. This is the same senator Manchin that ran televised campaign ads shooting a shotgun and saying he was going to blow a hole in Obama’s climate plan. This is the same Senator Manchin who owns between \$1-5 million in coal stocks. This is the same Senator Manchin who received more campaign donations from coal, oil and natural gas industries than any other senator. This is the same Senator Manchin who will convert the energy grid to renewable energy?

The senator’s spokesman said the “*Senator is in full compliance with Senate ethics and financial disclosure rules.*” The rules are insufficient in determining if someone has a conflict of interest. As Seth Rogan said, “**This is as if Pete Rose, instead of hiding his gambling problem, would call his bookie from second base.**”

In preparation for his assignment, he’s been meeting with lobbyists from solar storage companies and innovative wind technologies. **No, sorry**, I was just being silly. He’s meeting with lobbyists from the natural gas and utilities industries who will likely be telling him what they want from the senator they bought.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST WRIT LARGE:

Manchin founded the coal brokerage Enersystems in 1988 and helped run the company. While a state senator in the 1990’s, Manchin was periodically invited to submit regulatory comments to the **West Virginia Public Service Commission** on behalf of Enersystems. By 1994, Manchin had become state chair of the right-wing **American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)** and a national director of the secretive group, which crafts model bills that benefit corporate interests such as its fossil fuel industry members. In 2000, when he was elected Secretary of State, Manchin handed the operation of



Coal Tradition\$

Enersystems to his son Joseph, and after being elected governor in 2004, said he put his investments in a blind trust.

Manchin earns hundreds of thousands of dollars each year through coal sales to power plants. His family company, Enersystems, is a contractor of **American Bituminous Power Partners (AmBit)**, a coal power plant located near Grant Town, W.V. that provides energy to **Monogahela Power Company**, according to documents from the West Virginia Public Services Commission. Also known as **Mon Power**, the electric company is a subsidiary of energy giant **FirstEnergy** and a member of trade group **Edison Electric Institute (EEI)**.

In Manchin’s most recent financial disclosure, covering the fiscal year 2020, he reports that his non-public shares of Enersystems are worth between \$1 million and \$5 million, and sent him an income of \$492,000. His total income from the company since joining the Senate is more than \$4.5 million.

Enersystems is a “contract services and material provider for utility plants,” supplying “**waste coal**.” The grassroots non-profit Energy Justice Network, founded by environmental activist Mike Ewall, says that waste coal—commonly called “gob” in West Virginia—

contains four times more mercury than bituminous coal and higher levels of sulfur, creating tons of polluting waste coal ash when burned.

Manchin’s favors for the coal industry as West Virginia governor didn’t just benefit Enersystems’ business partners—those around him also cashed in on their connections to the industry. When Manchin moved to D.C., his longtime chief of staff **Larry Puccio**, who had been with him from the Secretary of State’s office to the Governor’s Mansion, started lobbying for busi-

nesses including the Virginia-based Southern Coal Corporation. Puccio was also elected chairman of the West Virginia Democratic Party, and in 2015 stepped down from that role to become chairman of Manchin’s leadership PAC, **Country Roads PAC**, promoting policies that could benefit the coal industry. Larry Puccio, As of 2014, Puccio’s lobbying practice had **Mon Power** owner FirstEnergy as a client, and state ethics records show that Puccio has remained registered to lobby for FirstEnergy since 2017. FirstEnergy’s PAC has donated \$35,000 to Country Roads PAC since the 2009-2010 election cycle, according to Federal Election Commission records, with more donations coming in to the PAC from American Electric Power, Dominion Energy, **EEI**.

Last year, **EEI** used lobbying efforts by **FirstEnergy** as case studies in boot camps for executives on how to defeat clean energy campaigns, including through interference with initiatives brought to voters through ballot measures.

Puccio, described as a “kingmaker” by West Virginia press, crossed the aisle last year to support the reelection of Republican Gov. Jim Justice, a former Democrat who took the general election with nearly 65% of the vote. Puccio’s lobbying disclosure from January through April of this year also lists Diversified Gas & Oil Corporation as a client.

In June, Manchin defended the continued burning of coal in remarks delivered to the annual conference of the **EEI**, at the event called “**The Road to Net Zero**,” which also featured Eric Holdsworth, director of climate programs for **EEI**, who previously served as deputy director of the industry group **Global Climate Coalition** that attacked climate science and lobbied against climate policy in the 1990s and early 2000s. Edison Electric Institute spends more than \$8 million a year on lobbying the federal government, according to **OpenSecrets.org**.

In his comments to **EEI**, Manchin argued that coal-fired plants are being unfairly targeted by environmentalists and claimed that the U.S. has relatively few coal plants, according to Utility Dive. A new report from the International Energy Agency found that coal and fossil gas power plants worldwide need to be retired as soon as 2035 if major emitters including the U.S. are to meet their targets for decarbonization.

Manchin expressed skepticism about the Biden administration’s goals to halve greenhouse gas emissions from their 2005 levels by 2030, a policy target for which there are still no binding laws. In the current Congress, Manchin’s vote would almost certainly be necessary for the Senate to approve plans to reduce polluting emissions, which would require a clean-energy transition for the coal industry of West Virginia.

As the effects of climate degradation continue to mount, and as deadlines approach to cut polluting emissions, members of Congress have \$93 million invested in fossil fuel industry stocks as of 2019.

A Greenfuse remix featuring opinion from: Lisa Argento Martell And reporting from: David Moore readsludge.com

Taliban Cops Aren’t as Bad as American Cops

Journalism needs a new rule. Are you reporting about a human rights violation in another country? If the United States commits the same offense, you should be required to refer to that fact in your article or broadcast.

Criticizing how a nation treats its prisoners or responds to internal dissent implies that the behavior being discussed falls outside international norms. If your own country does the same thing and you don’t mention it, your lie of omission strips your story of context.

There have been many examples of such journalistic malfeasance in coverage of the Taliban since their takeover of Afghanistan.

“Taliban fighters used whips and sticks against a group of women protesting in Kabul,” CNN reported September 9th. “The fighters also beat a number of journalists covering the demonstration, according to witnesses.”

This is terrible. Violent suppression of peaceful protests should be covered and widely circulated, as was this story—although it’s hardly surprising that a brand-new revolutionary government might not be terribly tolerant of criticism less than two weeks after seizing power. The same goes for the brutal mistreatment of reporters.

Compared with the terrifying arsenal of devices wielded by the police and other officials against peaceful marchers who dare to protest the policies of the two-centuries-old United States of America, those Afghan women got off easy. Weapons deployed by U.S. au-

thorities against peaceful Black Lives Matters marchers include pepper spray, pepper balls, blast balls, paintballs, tear gas, sting-ball and flashbang grenades, sponge rounds, rubber and wooden bullets and beanbag rounds, tasers, and Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRADs), a.k.a. sound cannons.

“Horrible, nauseating pain hit my body,” journalist Cory Choy, who was covering the 2014 BLM protests when he was attacked by a sonic weapon deployed by the NYPD, told Popular Mechanics, “and then I realized it was sound. At first you just think, ‘What’s happening to me?’ Your body goes into complete pain and panic mode. It’s the sound equivalent of looking into the sun.”

In 2020 Buffalo police gratuitously shoved a 75-year-old attending a BLM protest to the ground, leaving the man unconscious and bleeding from his ear, without calling an ambulance. That same year mounted police in Houston used horses to trample demonstrators. I would rather face sticks and whips than a weaponized horse.



The fact that American cops treat protesters more viciously and more violently than the Taliban in no way excuses the brutality of the Taliban. But news consumers need and deserve context. In this example, beatings of the Kabuli women should probably have run under the headline “Compared to Americans, Taliban Response to Protests is Restrained.”

Western media outlets responded with similarly context-free outrage to the Taliban’s announcement that demonstrators would have to apply for a permit before they were allowed to protest on streets in Afghanistan. “The interior ministry of the new Taliban government is seeking to end protests in Afghanistan after days of demonstrations that have brought heavy-handed assaults on protesters,” reported the Associated Press. But their lede was belied by the second sentence of their coverage: “The minister has issued an order to end all protests in the country—unless demonstrators get prior permission, including approval of slogans and banners.” You can protest. But you need permission.

Which is appalling. The right to peacefully petition the government over grievances goes back thousands of years and has been honored by absolute monarchs. No one, anywhere, should have to apply for a protest permit.

As everyone who has ever been involved in street activism knows, however, Americans do not enjoy significantly more rights than the people of Afghanistan when they decide to pick up signs and march down a public street. Like the Taliban, American cops require that you file for a protest permit. If you ignore the requirement, they crush you like a bug.

On the weekend of August 28, National Parks police issued six protest permits to the Reverend Al Sharpton’s National Action Network, a commemoration of the first March on Washington, a march in favor of D.C. statehood, another for criminal justice reform and, ironically, a march for the First Amendment. These protest permits allowed these groups to walk on the National Mall, which is public property. I say the First Amendment is my protest permit.

Philadelphia, cradle of American liberty, requires a protest permit for any gathering involving more than 75 people. These rules are commonplace throughout the United States, as are the notorious “free speech zones” that place demonstrators so far away from the targets of their complaints that they had might as well be on the moon.

Perhaps someday outrage over oppression in places like Afghanistan will prompt Americans to take note of, and do something about, suppression of dissent here at home.

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