

GOP offers inadequate infrastructure plan that lets the rich off free



By John Wojcik

Republican senators outlined a \$928 billion infrastructure proposal Thursday that drastically slashes what President Joe Biden has proposed and sets things up so that the wealthy, unlike the rest of the country, will pay nothing toward fixing the nation's crumbling infrastructure. In fact, in what is perhaps the most unacceptable part of their "counter-offer" to Biden's plan, which the president has already cut from \$2 trillion-plus to \$1.7 trillion, the Republicans want to pay for their plan by taking away money intended for coronavirus aid.

The parties could not be further apart on the funding issue. Biden wants to raise taxes on the rich, and Republicans want to protect their wealthy benefactors by paying for infrastructure with funds intended to squash the pandemic.

The Republican offer would increase spending from current levels by \$91 billion on roads and bridges, \$48 billion on water resources, and \$25 billion on airports, according to a skimpy one-page summary released by the GOP negotiators. It also would provide for one-time increases in broadband investments, at \$65 billion, and, in an attempt to mollify Biden, who loves Amtrak, \$22 billion on rail.

Republicans categorically reject Biden's proposed corporate tax increase to pay for new investments and instead want to shift badly needed COVID-19

relief dollars to cover their inadequate plan.

Their plan leaves out all of Biden's proposals to fix underlying human infrastructure problems, ones that have to be solved if funding for things like roads and bridges is to be effective. There is nothing in the GOP proposals that makes it easier for workers to take care of their families or to rebuild crumbling schools, health facilities, and other institutions.

Biden has made serious concessions to the GOP already, by reducing his original \$2.3 trillion

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American Jobs Plan to \$1.7 trillion. Republicans want more than three quarters of a trillion more in cuts, and they want to fund their inadequate plan by taking money from working class and poor people rather than from the wealthy and corporations.

Democrats have already gotten signals from the

Their plan makes it clear yet again that, for them, protecting the wealthy trumps fixing infrastructure.

Senate parliamentarian that they would be able to pass most of their infrastructure proposals with the reconciliation process, which would require no support from Republicans.

Biden has been making clear that the choice here for Americans is whether they want to continue the policy of one tax break after another to corporations and the rich or whether, once and for all, they want to overhaul the nation's infrastructure.

Republicans insist on defining infrastructure as money only for roads, bridges, ports, and water systems, while Biden takes a more expansive view that includes the nation's schools, hospitals, affordable massive housing programs, and extensive child care systems as part of infrastructure.

Even Biden's pared-down proposal would fund efforts to deal with climate change, put \$174 billion into development of electric vehicles and charging stations, and set aside \$50 billion so communities can better deal with floods, hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural disasters. Republicans

absurdly claim that none of these things are part of infrastructure.

Ignoring what people everywhere want and need, Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., said the Republicans' proposal reflects "what people at home in Wyoming think of as infrastructure – roads with potholes." Presumably, he is saying that schools, hospitals, and all the other things are of no concern to the people in his state.

The White House has said that using COVID-19 relief money to pay for infrastructure was a "nonstarter," noting that much of that money has been allocated or used and that the remainder will be used as the need arises to fight the virus.

Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., is falsely claiming there is \$700 billion in unspent COVID-19 aid from the American Rescue Plan, which was the administration's \$1.9 trillion response to the coronavirus crisis earlier this year. The administration says that this money is part of a long-range plan to deal with the virus.

Climate-fueled drought endangers American West ahead of wildfire season

By Climate Nexus

At the opening of the 2020 wildfire season, 3% of California was in extreme or exceptional drought and more than 4% burned. This year, more than 73% of the state faces similar drought conditions.

In other parts of the Southwest, juniper trees are dying off at increased rates because of the intensification of a climate change-fueled megadrought and turning forests, with trees covered in dead needles, into 30-foot-tall tinder boxes.

"It's like having gasoline out there," Brian Steinhardt, a national forest fire zone manager in Arizona, told the AP.

Soil in the western U.S. is drier than at any time since 1895 (the year Frederick Douglass died and Babe Ruth was born), which means "the dice are loaded toward a lot of forest fire this year," UCLA climate and fire scientist Park Williams told the AP.

New research also shows wildfires are burning at higher elevations as climate change dries out forests previously too wet to support large burns.

All this adds up, Steinhardt, a veteran of 32 fire seasons, told the AP, to "probably one of the driest and potentially most challenging situations

I've been in." California, on the verge of its first ever official water shortage declaration, is increasing its wildfire prevention spending 16-fold, but states across the West, from Oregon to New Mexico, are staring down the barrel of a brutally dry and dangerous fire season.

Water shortages that "just couldn't be any worse," according to Klamath Irrigation District president Ty Kliewer, threaten massive die-offs of the salmon central to the diet and culture of the Yurok Tribe.

One silver lining for the 2021 fire season is that 2020's record-shattering burns were fueled by a highly unusual concurrence of record-breaking heatwaves and intense, widespread lightning strikes, UCLA meteorologist Daniel Swain told the AP. But, he added, "I'm really grasping at straws here. All we have going for us is dumb luck."

This year, more than 73% of California face threatening drought conditions.

West Virginia unions sue state for attacking unionized workers



By Mark Gruenberg

In yet another battle seeing unions defending their members and themselves against continued right-wing assaults from coast to coast, West Virginia unions sued the GOP-dominated state government there for illegal retaliation against unionized workers by banning automatic dues collection from those workers' paychecks.

The suit, led by the state AFL-CIO, says HB2009, the so-called "paycheck protection" act, violates due process and the state constitution. It's also retaliation from right-wing GOP Gov. Jim Justice, who is a billionaire and the state's wealthiest person.

"Paycheck protection," which unionists call "paycheck deception," is one of a horde of anti-worker anti-union measures enacted in Republican-run states. Many of them are designed to, as one right-wing leader once told the British press to "defund the left."

And many, including paycheck protection, were also crafted by the American Legislative Exchange Council, a secretive cabal of corporate interests and radical right legislators, who meet to scheme ways to impose their agenda on the rest of the U.S.

The suit, filed May 20 in Kanawha County Circuit Court in the state capital, Charleston, says the law "selectively prohibits the long-standing"—50-year—"practice and contractual rights of public employees and their employers to have dues automatically deducted."

Banning the deductions also violates free speech rights under the state constitution, the suit says. It "legislative animus" against unions from the heavily GOP state House and Senate drove HB2009.

The ban also makes no sense in the workplaces both statewide and in its 55 counties, school boards and other unionized public agencies, such as fire departments.

The law "selectively and discriminately prohibits paycheck deductions for public employees and their unions, a practice that has gone on for more than 50 years without a problem, while still allowing hundreds of other paycheck deductions to remain in place," state AFL-CIO President Josh Sword said in a statement.

"This is still America, and we should not have our freedom attacked and we think this is an attack on our freedoms to spend our money how we want to spend it," added American Federation of Teachers-WV President Fred Albert.

Besides the state fed and the Teachers, other unions suing the state in general and Justice in particular are the Mine Workers, Communications Workers District 2-13 and also Locals 2055, 2019—which represents state troopers—and 2001, the West Virginia Fire Fighters, the West Virginia Education Association, the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association and Steelworkers District 8. Local 2055 represents corrections officers. The state Federation of Police, which is not a union, also signed on.

Unions say the so-called "paycheck protection law" is really a deception law that violates the state's constitution.

Netanyahu's police launch mass arrests of Palestinian Israeli citizens

By Steve Sweeney

Israel moved to crush the Palestinian resistance Monday as it launched a "law and order" campaign with the arrest of hundreds of leading figures involved in the latest uprising.

Police announced their intention to arrest more than 500 Palestinian citizens of Israel over the next 48 hours under the guise of security measures. But academic Dr. Yara Hawari said that Tel Aviv had "declared war against Palestinians who dare to resist its colonial project and demand freedom."

Israeli forces swooped to arrest and jail a number of Palestinians in Jerusalem who were attacked by settlers for defending themselves. They were sentenced to 18 months, while the settlers remain free.

According to the Palestinian Prisoners Club, the number of arrests reached more than 2,400 cases, including women, children, and the wounded.

Hawari called on the international community to keep up the pressure on the Israeli government which has found itself increasingly isolated on the world stage.

The Bank of Palestine Group launched the "Palestine in the Heart" campaign in partnership with the U. N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to raise funds for relief efforts in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

More than 1,000 homes have been destroyed and 66 schools and primary healthcare clinics have been damaged.

According to UNICEF, 72,000 Palestinians have been displaced since Israel's latest bombing campaign began, half of them children.

Una semana de movilizaciones, desencuentros y triunfos en Colombia

BY PRENSA LATINA

Bogotá, 22 may Colombia vivió jornadas caracterizadas por multitudinarias movilizaciones, intentos de diálogos y algunos resultados en la lucha social de los diversos sectores participantes en el paro nacional, durante la semana.

En los últimos siete días, miles de personas salieron a las calles en ciudades y zonas rurales para manifestar su rechazo a las políticas en todas las áreas del gobierno del presidente Iván Duque.

Los colombianos marcharon contra las privatizaciones, la violencia sistemática contra líderes sociales, indígenas y exguerrilleros; contra la militarización; contra la represión policial y por el desmantelamiento del Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios (Esmad).

Para el columnista Walter Rodríguez, Colombia arde, entre otras cosas, porque la protesta pacífica se convierte en violencia cuando aparecen los miembros de este cuerpo élite de la Policía Nacional 'no solo para hacer represión sino para asesinar'.

El Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos en Colombia asegura que el Esmad viola sistemáticamente los derechos humanos en Colombia, abusa de su poder, ejerce la fuerza de manera ilegal y desproporcionada y no cumple los protocolos de actuación.

Durante esta semana de estallido social, el Comité de Paro Nacional volvió a sentarse a la mesa con representantes gubernamentales para pausar el camino en pos de un diálogo y solucionar la crisis en el país.

Una de las condiciones formuladas por esta agrupación que acoge a sindicatos, colectivos estudiantiles y organizaciones campesinas, entre otras, es que el gobierno garantice las manifestaciones pacíficas sin violencia.

Aunque el Comité ya anunció algunos avances hacia las negociaciones, lo cierto es que por el día tienen lugar los acercamientos con el gobierno, y en las noches la policía reprime a los manifestantes.

De acuerdo con denuncias, la actitud de los uniformados responde, en parte, a una criticada orden del presidente Duque, quien el lunes pasado ordenó a la fuerza pública desplegar su 'máxima capacidad operacional' para quitar los bloqueos de las vías en el contexto del paro nacional contra su gobierno.

Esta semana, la presión popular logró que el Congreso archivara una lesiva reforma de Salud con marcado carácter privatizador y, además, que la Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol (Conmebol) rechazara una solicitud de Colombia para aplazar la Copa América 2021.

Por lo tanto, los partidos programados en este país, incluida la final del torneo, una de las sedes junto a Argentina, se realizarán en otras locaciones.

En Colombia, donde hay bastante devoción por el fútbol, una gran cantidad de personas, incluso los hinchas de los conjuntos locales, recibió la noticia con beneplácito por considerar que hay otras prioridades como la lucha social.