The Washington Post

Opinion: Joe Manchin is wrong about spending on climate change. It would be good for his state.

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Columnist

As Congress haggles over a multitrillion-dollar budget deal, Sen. Joe Manchin III (D.-W.Va.) wants to cut a program to fight climate change. He's making a mistake, not just for the planet but also for workers in West Virginia.

Like every piece of this huge spending package, details about the climate change provisions are up for negotiation. Fine, that's how legislation works. But to drop climate change provisions altogether would be nuts. Other parts of the infrastructure and social spending deal are important; climate change is existential.

as the CEPP plan envisions. They need some reliable low-carbon alternative fuels to make sure the power grid doesn't crash if the wind doesn't blow, the sun doesn't shine, weather disasters occur — and batteries can't fill the gap. But the answer isn't to kill the clean energy program — it's to adapt it so that utilities can meet achievable goals.

As moderate and progressive Democrats look for a compromise, they should study proposals from a group called the Labor Energy Partnership. It's sponsored by the AFL-CIO and the Energy Futures Initiative, created by former energy secretary Ernest Moniz. Its reports highlight two oft-

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Manchin dislikes a provision called the Clean Energy Performance Program (CEPP), which would provide $150 billion to reward utilities for moving quickly to renewable energy, such as wind and solar. He'd rather spend some of that money for what's known as "firm power," which means low-carbon fuels that can backstop the renewable sources.

Manchin has a point, actually. Utilities aren't sure they can make the transition as quickly

overlooked points in the climate debate: Low-carbon fuels of some sort will be needed for years to supplement renewables, and a viable "net-zero" strategy requires removing carbon from the air and oceans— a huge challenge and one that will employ many workers.

The beginning of wisdom is to understand, as the AFL-CIO does, that the transition to a net-zero clean energy economy will be a job creator. American workers will build and

install wind turbines, solar panels and other renewable technologies. American workers will build vast fleets of electric vehicles; they'll work in a modernized fuels industry to supply the firm power that can sustain the grid.

And perhaps most important, American workers will be part of a huge new project to capture carbon in the air and sea, transport it to storage locations and bury it there. Moniz argues that this process of putting captured carbon safely back in the ground will be as intensive as the fossil fuel industry's centuries of extraction from wells and mines.

As world leaders prepare for the Glasgow climate change summit, starting Oct. 31, the urgency of their mission is obvious in extreme weather events around the world. According to data gathered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the United States in 2020 suffered 22 weather and climate disasters that cost $1 billion or more, compared with an average of about seven events annually from 1980 to 2020.

Moniz has made two contrarian arguments in testimony this year to Congress. First, to the consternation of some wind and solar advocates, he contends that reliable power will be needed for periods when the wind doesn't blow or the sun doesn't shine. California data analyzed by his group showed that in 2017, California had 90 days with little or no wind, sometimes 10 days in a row. Even with recent technology advances, batteries won't solve such problems of "intermittency," Moniz says.

"You'll need fuels" to provide reliability, Moniz told me in a recent interview. That could be some form of clean hydrogen, from water or perhaps natural gas. The increase in erratic weather events, like the freeze last winter that crashed the Texas grid, make these backup fuels even more important. Europe's energy crunch this fall, dubbed "the first big energy scare of the green era" by the Economist, makes the same point.

Carbon capture and storage might be the most important and least understood item on the Glasgow agenda. A 2020 report from the International Energy Agency stressed that carbon removal will play "a key role" in transition to net-zero. The technology for direct air capture, through filters that chemically bind with carbon dioxide, is still evolving. But at least 15 such plants are now operating in Europe and North America.

The scale of the decarbonization effort is immense. The Labor Energy Partnership argued in a June paper that gigatons of carbon must be captured, transported and stored. How much is that? Scientists estimate that one gigaton is equivalent to 10,000 fully loaded aircraft carriers. The paper didn't estimate how people would be employed in capture and storage, but it predicted that other decarbonization efforts will employ at least 1.5 million.

"Save the planet" should be a powerful enough argument to fund climate change proposals in the budget deal. But if that doesn't work for you, how about: Jobs, jobs, jobs?

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