

There is no clearer evidence of the truth of that axiom than the ridicule and abuse heaped on West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin by White House functionaries and members of Congress after he announced his opposition to the Administration's Build Back Better social infrastructure proposal.

In a remarkably ill-advised rant, presidential press secretary Jen Psaki, in effect, branded the Senator a liar — a “breach of commitment to the president,” she called it, a slightly more polite but unmistakable “liar, liar pants on fire” accusation.

Whether her soaring rhetoric was a case of flying solo or with presidential clearance is immaterial. It is the agent principle that applies; as press secretary, she is an agent of the president— her words are his words.

The far left progressives in the House piled on, accusing Manchin of betrayal and disloyalty to the president and of contempt for his constituents. His concerns over spending another \$1.75 trillion at a time of record-setting national debt, inflation at its highest level in decades and dealing with a potentially economic wrecking pandemic was sneered at and labeled barnyard excrement.

As many Democrats fretted that the unduly harsh and personal reaction was a misstep that would make it even more difficult to persuade Manchin to provide the crucial 50th vote in support of the proposal, Psaki sounded a more conciliatory tone and said the Administration would continue to collaborate closely with the Senator to find common ground.

The damage, though, had been done and, short of withdrawing her remarks altogether, her initial characterization of Manchin will linger.

The episode is symptomatic of a mindset of individuals who occupy seats of power or on the fringes of authority but whose egos and inexperience are barriers to better judgments and sound political instincts.

They operate from a conviction that their ideas and the agenda items they support are infallible. They are pathologically incapable of understanding why someone else refuses to acknowledge their brilliance and wisdom or recognize their place in the political hierarchy.

When Manchin delivered a mortal blow to the infrastructure program, he delivered an equally devastating blow to the egos of Administration figures as well as to congressional colleagues.

As amateurs are wont to do, the aggrieved responded with personal attacks, believing that the senator's opposition was directed at them personally. It was seen as an unacceptable defeat which diminished their perceived importance in the eyes of the public and could not be allowed to go unchallenged.

In their view, Manchin's act could not stand. It deserved a harsh response delivered with a rhetorical assault on his character, motives, competency, and intellect.

In addition to Psaki's description of him as less than truthful, Manchin was accused of turning his back on financially struggling families, denying help to the ill who couldn't afford prescription drugs, preventing paid leave for those caring for a sick child or family member,

closing the door on the benefits of early childhood education and dooming the planet by blocking an aggressive effort to address climate change.

Framing their denunciations around issues of emotional impact – children, the ill, financially strapped families with nowhere to turn for help, etc. – Manchin's critics sought to shame him into abandoning his opposition while ratcheting up outside pressures on him.

He responded by portraying his accusers as ideologues who believed they could pummel him into submission and who summarily dismissed his concerns over the potentially adverse economic impact of the proposal.

His refusal to back down came after weeks of expressing his opposition while he negotiated with the Administration as well as the president personally, all to no avail.

More seasoned, experienced and politically instinctual individuals would have expressed their disappointment with his decision, renewed their commitment to the president's program and pledged to continue their efforts to resolve their differences with Manchin.

Instead, too many hands with personal grievances decided to poison the well.

Manchin selected his response carefully to avoid holding Biden responsible for the breakdown or the criticisms that followed.

In a revealing comment, he said the Administration was totally staff driven, comprised of individuals who acted on their own to undermine him and, in some cases, use their media access to misrepresent his position.

He may have inadvertently provided ammunition to those who believe Biden is not fully engaged and that high level staff are manipulating or misleading him. It feeds also the persistent rumors that the president's cognitive edge has been dulled over the years.

Manchin has shown no indication he intends to budge from his position and, at one point, suggested the entire infrastructure proposal be returned to the drawing board, starting anew and scrutinizing each element in the massive legislation, a task which would likely take months.

At the same time, the progressive bloc in the House urged the president to use his executive authority to implement its provisions or separate them and call for congressional action on each independently. Neither is realistic.

To be sure, there will be attempts made to smooth over the ill will that's been created although Manchin may find being called a liar too bitter a pill to swallow.

Senate Republicans have gleefully seized on the anti-Manchin uproar to invite him to switch parties and join Republican ranks, a move which would swing Senate control to the GOP.

It is certain, though, that the issue will spill over into the 2022 session of Congress, an eventuality that carries its' own political risk in becoming a major issue of contention in the midterm elections.

Democrats already stand in danger of losing their majorities and, for many incumbents in competitive districts, being forced to vote on a massive social welfare spending program will heighten that danger.

When amateurs are in control, political dilemmas are created and traps sprung. All in the service of egos and all needlessly.

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