

OPINION | REVIEW & OUTLOOK

## *Joe Manchin Plays Political Chess*

As progressives rage against him, he's helping the Democratic Party.

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By [The Editorial Board](#)

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Sen. Joe Manchin on May 18.

PHOTO: J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Joe Manchin has brought the wrath of the political left down upon him after writing in a hometown newspaper on the weekend that he doesn't support a federal takeover of state voting law and won't break the Senate filibuster. But the West Virginia Senator is playing political chess—and doing Democrats a favor too.

“This is so on brand for this country. Record number of black voters show up to save this democracy, only for white supremacy to be upheld by a cowardly, power-hungry white dude. @Sen\_JoeManchin is a clown,” tweeted Jemele Hill, one of the left's more nuanced [Twitter](#) enforcers.

A sagacious aide to Sen. Dick Durbin used Twitter to say “I don't think our founding fathers anticipated the survival of this democratic experiment to rest in the hands of a

man who lives in a house boat,” as Mr. Manchin apparently does. What’s wrong with house boats? She later deleted her tweet.

Especially obtuse are the progressives tweeting that Senate Democrats should strip Mr. Manchin of his committee assignments. By all means, please do. As the majority maker in a 50-50 Senate, Mr. Manchin could change parties and have his pick of committee seats as a member of the GOP majority. Readers who reached maturity before the Age of Woke recall that James Jeffords, a Vermont Republican, switched parties and made Democrats the majority in a 50-50 Senate in spring 2001.

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Mr. Manchin has never been known as a fierce conviction politician. He’s not Rand Paul (R., Ky.) voting to kill the GOP’s ObamaCare reform in 2017 because it wasn’t libertarian pure. Mr. Manchin is a canny operator from a right-leaning state who is trying to navigate between his West Virginia constituents and the bullying demands of the left-wing Democrats who dominate the national party.

He’s also no fool. He knows that embracing the Senate’s version (S.1) of Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s election bill would play poorly in West Virginia. And he knows that breaking the 60-vote filibuster rule to do it would compound the harm by unleashing other left-wing legislation.

Never mind his own fate if he runs for re-election in 2024. Mr. Manchin knows that passing the left’s agenda on a partisan vote in a deeply divided country would produce a political backlash that would cost Democrats control of Congress in 2022. Other Democrats, especially those who hold swing seats in the House, quietly agree with him. They’re happy to let Joe take the political heat.

But Democrats shouldn’t fear, nor Republicans gloat, that this means the end of the Biden agenda. Mr. Manchin’s filibuster position—shared by Arizona’s Kyrsten Sinema—may kill some radical legislation. But Democrats still have a budget reconciliation card to play that requires only 50 votes plus Vice President Kamala Harris as a tie-breaker.

That’s how Democrats passed their Covid bill, and our guess is that Mr. Manchin has already signaled privately that he’ll support a large tax-and-spend bill traveling under the false flag of “infrastructure.” Opposing S.1 gives him more running room to do that.

Unless the left is dumb enough to drive Mr. Manchin to the GOP—and it may be—the Senator is still a loyal Democrat. He’s simply not suicidal.

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2021

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