

What follows is my running commentary on the “Guest Column” (unpaid political ad, to be more accurate) written for the *Daytona Beach News-Journal* by Rep. Michael Waltz. I rather doubt that Waltz himself wrote the column. However, as with so much else, once you put your name to it, you own it. If he had submitted crap like this to my freshman English or expository writing class, I’d have hammered him.

There’s a funny kind of cognitive dissonance running throughout this: We cannot lose the social safety net of *Medicare*, *Medicaid*, and *Social Security*. They are running out of money. But we cannot raise taxes to pay for them.

The obvious alternative would be to cut spending. Suppose we start by cutting subsidies for fossil fuel, multi-national agribusiness, and the military.

### **Democratic spending plan is disaster for Fla.**

Let’s start with the title itself. I’ve written before about the framing implicit in calling President Biden’s proposal a “spending plan.” In respect to political rhetoric, that’s acceptably within the rules of the game. In respect to substance, of course, he demonstrates with his first three words that nothing else he is going to say will be in the least bit relevant. He says he’s going to write about something that doesn’t actually exist.

Start with the key word, “is.” Every English sentence pivots on its main verb. This verb is in the present tense. But the subject preceding the verb is “plan.” A plan is a proposal for something that has not yet happened. How can something that has not yet happened be a disaster already? The proper verb for him to have used with his lie is “would be.”

*Editor's note: This column reflects the status of the Build Back Better proposal at this section's press time. Ongoing negotiations may change the specifics of the bill. [Note from News-Journal editor.]*

President Joe Biden and *Democrats* in Congress, with zero input from *Republicans*, are currently negotiating how best to pass a massive \$3.5 trillion “social infrastructure” package. This massive bill includes hundreds of provisions that, if passed, would do serious harm to our country and especially *Florida*.

I like this paragraph better. It presents a good, clear statement of his thesis. Rhetorically, however, there is a wee bit of slipperiness. It lies in the phrase “with zero input from *Republicans*.” In the first place, that’s a lie. For example, Joe Manchin worked hard for weeks to try to line up *Republican* help for avoiding the filibuster. He included every suggestion they made...and yet they still voted against it. In the second place, the phrase raises a crucial question: **Why** was there zero input from *Republicans*?

In a functional legislative body, someone makes a proposal; the proposal is debated in good faith; if the debate is productive, a compromise that’s as close as possible to win-win equity is achieved and the proposal is approved. But today’s *US Congress* is far from functional. In the *Senate* especially *Republicans* **never** debate in good faith. They simply say **no** to everything. They have no interest in governing. Their only interest is in destroying.

Despite having nearly \$1 trillion left in unspent COVID relief funds when Biden took office, and another \$1.9 trillion passed soon after, *Democrats* and the Biden administration are yet again trying to jam through a package that will vastly expand the role of government in our lives and drive our entitlement programs into insolvency.

For Waltz to mention the unspent COVID funds is a questionable tactic. Why? Because the reason the funds remain unspent is that *Republican* governors like Ron DeSantis have simply left them lying on the table instead of using them to help the people of their states.

“Jam through” and its close cousin “ram through” have become simply empty political rhetoric. What he means is just that the *Democrats* are trying to pass the bill, except that he’s given the process a negative connotation. The “insolvency” echoes the lie in his title. There is no “spending” program; there is an “investment” package, which includes raising money as well as spending it. And if you’re raising the money that you’re spending, then the question of insolvency becomes irrelevant.

The word “entitlement” deserves a special attention. Technically, to be “entitled” means simply to have the legal right to receive something, to do something, or perhaps not to do it. But it’s used most commonly in contexts like, “That jerk has such an attitude of entitlement!” Meaning, “that person seems to feel he should receive special benefits or privileges *without having had to earn and/or deserve them.*” This negative connotation then attaches when the term is used in reference to *Government* programs like *Social Security*.

Technically the reference Waltz makes is appropriate. However, because of the implicit framing, no *Democrat* and no journalist should ever use the term in that context.

These provisions are far from the promise of the “Build Back Better” theme President Biden has deceptively championed. Rather, this legislation will send our country into even more economic uncertainty as *Floridians* grapple with high inflation, rising gas prices, backlogged shipping and more expensive groceries.

What exactly are the “provisions of the promise,” Rep Waltz? In what exact ways has President Biden been deceptive?

*Republicans* love to mock “tax and spend *Democrats*.” We *Democrats* could legitimately respond with the phrase “spend without taxing *Republicans*.” The Biden plan would have no effect on economic uncertainty if *Republicans* would agree to rescind the outrageous tax cuts they passed under President Trump.

Inflation exists, but isn't high; the price of gasoline has nothing to do with decisions Biden has made; and the backlog in shipping is due to Donald Trump's pandemic.

Many of these provisions raise serious red flags:

The corrections I pointed out raise much more serious red flags.

An amnesty plan for eight million illegal immigrants that is estimated to cost more than \$100 billion over the next decade and a lifetime net cost of roughly \$1 trillion to *Medicare* and *Social Security*. Included in this plan is an exemption that would allow the Biden Administration to allow illegal immigrants with serious crimes to become citizens; crimes that include human trafficking, narcotics violations and illegal voting.

*Amnesty* is a favorite *Republican* “dog whistle,” of course. No one I know proposes simply opening *America's* borders indiscriminately. Positive proposals include decriminalizing previous immigrants who have established lives here, and providing a means for them to earn full citizenship. Such proposals do not provide such an opportunity for serious criminals. (Incidentally, by a statistically significant percentage, immigrants commit fewer crimes than native born *Americans*.)

Immigrants are not freeloaders. They work hard, often at jobs native born *Americans* refuse to do, and for wages native born *Americans* would not accept. And they pay taxes, without enjoying the benefits the latter receive for paying the same taxes.

An expansion of *Medicaid*, which would force a new, redundant federal *Medicaid* program onto states like *Florida* that have fiscal discipline [“discipline”?] and chose not to expand *Medicaid* under *Obamacare*.

I honestly have no idea what he means in referring to a “redundant *Medicaid* program.” I do know that Rick Scott, the *Florida* governor who denied healthcare to *Floridians*, pleaded the 5th over 50 times (“I refuse to answer on the grounds that doing so might tend to incriminate me”) when the company of which he was CEO was on trial for *Medicare* fraud. They paid \$840 million in criminal fines, civil damages, and penalties for the largest case of *Medicare* fraud in the nation’s history. And I’m confident that the denial of *Medicaid* had much less to do with “fiscal discipline” than with political “optics.”

A hike in natural gas taxes which would further raise the cost of goods, already on track to be the highest since 1981, on nearly every industry. This tax is estimated to increase family energy bills up to \$242 per year.

The ten year package includes provisions to free *Americans* from their dependence on fossil fuels like natural gas. And there is no reason why corporations—more profitable now than ever before—should be allowed to “externalize” their taxes by passing the burden along to consumers.

A repeal of work requirements for already bloated entitlement spending programs which are already on the path to insolvency and are driving our national debt.

The public (as opposed to corporate) entitlement programs (see above re the term “entitlement”) are not bloated. The major driver of the national debt is a combination of military spending and the Trump/*Republican* feckless tax cutting on wealthy individuals and corporations. According to *Inequality.org*, “America’s billionaires have grown \$2.1 trillion richer during the

pandemic, their collective fortune skyrocketing by 70 percent.” That \$2.1 trillion would go along way toward paying for the President’s plan, wouldn’t it!

<https://inequality.org/great-divide/updates-billionaire-pandemic/>

A repeal of licenses for the mining industry, including one of the nation's largest copper mines, crushing the ability for *America* to produce the raw materials required for a green economy—ironically in the name of environmentalism.

Whoa! This is not just defending the indefensible; it’s promoting the monstrously evil and despicable. I’ll ask the environmental caucus to comment on this independently.

A new federal surveillance program that allows the *IRS* to monitor and track any transactions without a warrant. The proposal would allow the *IRS* “to review every account above a \$600 balance, or with more than \$600 of transactions in a year.” As we saw under the Obama Administration, the *IRS* has been used to target conservatives.

The \$600 part is true—but taken totally out of context and presented so as to sound really scary. It’s purpose is to catch major tax cheats, not to harass “little guys.” This is the way the major drug smugglers who made greater *Miami* flourish were identified. Here’s *U.S.A. Today’s* “Fact Check”:

“The claim’s assertion is a proposal by the Biden administration, not a decision set in stone. The *Treasury* cannot “declare” any changes to law, as that is a legislative power that belongs to *Congress*. And even if the proposal is adopted banks would not provide access to individual transactions, just the total amount flowing in and out of an account annually.”

The last assertion is total *QAnon*-level bullshit. If the proposed regulation led examiners to check the accounts of conservatives

more than those of persons with other political ideologies, that would be because conservatives were more guilty of behavior suggesting tax fraud than others.

Handouts to wealthy universities by reducing taxes on their endowments.

I admit that I don't know what this one is about. I'll have to check it out. I assume it has something to do with helping students pay for higher education, but I could be wrong.

Reinstating a "SALT" tax deduction for primarily *Democrat*-run states with high income taxes which forces residents of states with no state income taxes like *Florida* to subsidize wasteful spending programs and huge debts.

"SALT" here stands for "state and local taxes."

Florida *receives* billions of dollars more from the federal government than it sends in tax revenue. The fact that we lack a progressive state income tax is one of the reasons we get so many greedy *Republicans* like Donald Trump retiring here.

A \$10 billion program to give mortgage subsidies of up to \$82,000 to households making well over \$200,000 per year to purchase a home. *Democrats* claim this is to address racial disparity but it would only extrapolate already high housing costs.

Why? How? Are you sure "extrapolate" is really the best word for what you're saying here?

Last but not least, there's Biden's socialist tax plan that will not just tax the rich, but will target working class families, small businesses, and job creators across the country. *American* families and businesses would see a tax hike of \$2 trillion— the largest in our nation's history— that would affect *Americans* at every income level.

“Socialist!” Another dog whistle. Also, another pack of lies.

No one making less than \$400,000 annually would pay additional taxes. Does that sound like a “working class family” to you?

The term “small business” is an obfuscation relied on by politicians of every party. It’s like “family farm.” When people hear the term, they think of something like the farm where Dorothy and Toto lived in Kansas. Right! Do you want to know what “small business” actually means? Check some of the documents you can link to from this website: <https://www.state.gov/what-is-a-small-business/>. You’ll be shocked.

“Job creators” is a *Republican* favorite. I remember when an official of the Trump administration met with several hundred top business leaders in an auditorium while promoting his humongous tax cuts. “I’d like to know how many of you will be using these tax cuts to expand your business and create jobs,” he said. “Let me see a show of hands!” He seemed genuinely stunned when across the entire auditorium only three or four hands went up.

What most of the businesses actually did was stash the money offshore or use it to buy back their own stock so as to raise the price per share. They absolutely did not use it to create jobs.

What's worse is once the *Democrats* pass their social infrastructure agenda, it will be nearly impossible to pay for it or repeal it. As Ronald Reagan famously said, “The fastest way to eternal life on earth is through a government program.” Further, as *Democrat* Joe Manchin pointed out, our current *Medicare*, *Medicaid*, and *Social Security* programs as they stand today will go bankrupt in the next decade. Dramatically expanding them risks causing the entire social safety net to implode.

He does know how to pick his examples, doesn’t he! He’s been talking about how much he cares about the *American* working

class, so he starts by referencing the president who broke the power of organized labor, leaving workers to the tender mercies of corporate sharks.

And he's been talking about saving *Medicare*, *Medicaid*, and *Social Security*. Let me think.... Who was the president who said, "The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help"? Oh, yeah. That would be Ronald Reagan.

And if he's looking for a single *Democrat* to support him, whom would he choose? Oh, yeah. That would be Joe Manchin. The most conservative, regressive *Democrat* in the *Senate*. The one who is least representative of his party. The one who is doing more than anyone to block the President's plan to invest in the *American* people, the American economy, the *American* democracy, and the environment.

And on top of the monstrous "social infrastructure" bill, there's the \$1.2 trillion so-called bipartisan infrastructure package. A bill which normally funds badly needed roads, bridges, ports and other major projects allocates less than 25% to pay for what it's supposed to: hard infrastructure.

There is nothing "so-called" about the bipartisan nature of the bill. What the bill contains was known to everyone who agreed to its passage. Since when does Michael Waltz get to define what the term "infrastructure" means"?

I am reminded of the Obama/Romney debate when Romney tried to come up with a "Gotcha!" He pointed out that the *U.S. Navy* now has if you were ships and if used to. President Obama's response was obvious: Romney was living in the distant past. A single modern aircraft carrier could destroy an entire World War II fleet.

Left behind is *Central Florida*. The *Indian River Lagoon* is literally dying, as are the manatees that live there, and *Democrats*

were unable to fix the allocation of federal clean water funds that shorts *Florida* despite ranking near the top of all states in infrastructure needs.

Again, sorry. I don't know what he means when he says that "*Democrats* were unable to fix the allocation of federal clean water funds." I trust that environmentalists will be able to respond.

Sadly, the actual infrastructure funding in the bill is insufficient to make investments for the economy of the future—space. *Cape Canaveral* recently announced that it will soon be at full capacity. When that happens, launch providers ["providers"? meaning?] are likely to look elsewhere for their needs. Yet, the infrastructure bill that every *Democrat* in the *Florida* delegation supports does nothing to invest in *Kennedy Space Center* that facilitates launches for every aspect of our economy—communication, banking, navigation and so much more. *Florida* is in need of additional launch capacity and *Democrats* are missing the opportunity to invest in space infrastructure that will employ *Floridians* in high-paying STEM fields for the rest of this century.

I'm not well enough informed to respond here.

The Biden Administration is taking our country down a dangerous path with one fiscal crisis after another —and the Progressive's socialist spending agenda is just the next disastrous plan on President Biden's agenda. *America* and *Florida* literally cannot afford another disaster.

Wow! He ends with a real zinger, doesn't he. I don't actually remember any fiscal crises he mentioned. And I haven't a clue what he means when he refers to someone or some thing called "Progressive," who or which has a "socialist spending agenda"—whatever that is. In fact, I can't imagine what a "spending agenda" might be. An agenda to purchase goods and/or services, sure. But simply to spend?

With his final sentence, though, I totally agree. To reelect Michael Waltz, let alone—shudder—Donald Trump, would be a disaster *America* and *Florida* literally cannot afford.

*Michael Waltz's congressional district covers Volusia and Flagler counties.*