

Joe Biden's 'reckless disregard' of reality

Energy production, Russian import ban highlight challenges



A pumpjack pumps oil near Bakersfield, Texas, last April. The Biden administration's "lead-from-behind" policies are becoming more alarming, Winston writes. (Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call file photo)

When asked on Monday about President Joe Biden's refusal to reconsider his energy policies in light of the Ukraine crisis, former Energy Secretary Rick Perry said, "We are seeing the reality of reckless disregard for reality, and that's what this administration is doing." He went on, "The reality was, when you gave the Russians the weapon of energy, they were going to use it."

In today's global economy and world capitals, the stark reality that energy and national security policies are inextricably linked is a common topic of discussion, but it is a whole different matter when the world sees the impact of those policies, with terrible destruction of a country and the slaughter of its people.

Which is why the Biden administration's lead-from-behind policies, from discouraging domestic oil production to its decision to reach out to some of our nation's worst enemies for more oil rather than our domestic producers, are becoming increasingly alarming.

Reckless is not a word to throw around casually, but Biden's actions or lack of action are raising serious questions. Who thought allowing Russia to act as an intermediary in the Iran nuclear deal talks was a good idea? Who proposed a visit to Venezuela to discuss easing sanctions for oil? Why has Biden dithered while Europe acted? These are head-scratching decisions that are so concerning even members of Biden's own party are speaking up.

Calling Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro "a cancer to our hemisphere," Democratic New Jersey Sen. [Bob Menendez](#), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said, "I would strongly oppose any action that fills the pockets of regime oligarchs with oil profits while Maduro continues to deprive Venezuelans of basic human rights, freedoms, and even food."

Sen. [Jon Tester](#), D-Mont., also weighed in, saying, "We shouldn't be advancing other countries who don't share our values." Sen. [Joe Manchin III](#), D-W.Va., who led the effort to legislate a ban on Russian oil and gas, called for more domestic energy production.

Manchin looks like he might get his wish, at least on an oil ban. On Tuesday, Biden tried to get ahead of Congress and the American people when he announced that, going forward, the United States would ban Russian oil and

gas imports. But, in what has become a pattern of governing for this administration, they were a day late and a dollar short — literally and figuratively speaking.

Biden didn't lead on this issue. He followed, as he has done on so many other issues, from "transitory" inflation to arming the Ukrainians. In the case of the ban on Russian oil, he made his announcement only after pressure from both Republicans and Democrats who were moving legislation to ban Russian oil and gas imports. Only after a desperate call Monday to Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) by Biden himself — asking her to stop the legislation — apparently fell on deaf ears, did Biden have a seeming overnight conversion.

By Tuesday morning, he was at the microphone talking as if the Russian import ban had been his idea all along. It was classic Biden, jumping in front of a parade that was already marching down the street, trying to take credit for a policy he was dragged into supporting.

No one is fooled. Nor should they be fooled by some of Biden's claims in his announcement explaining what amounts to a 180-degree turnaround on banning Russian oil. He told reporters, among other things, "It's simply not true that my administration or policies are holding back domestic energy production, that's simply not true." He also called rising gas prices "Putin's price hike."

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki had already plowed that rocky ground in her press briefing the day before, blaming high gas prices on the Ukraine invasion after months of blaming the supply chain. Having Biden make the same point in his statement didn't make it any more believable. People aren't that gullible.

The fact is the average price of a gallon of regular gas on Feb. 22, 2021, was \$2.63. One year later, after Biden's decision to stop the Keystone XL

pipeline, after banning oil and gas drilling on federal lands and after putting the country on an accelerated and expensive path to green energy, on Feb. 21 of this year, three days before the invasion, the price of gas had reached \$3.53 a gallon, a 34 percent increase. As of this past Monday, it had jumped to \$4.10, a 16 percent increase from Feb. 21.

Biden is right that Russian President Vladimir Putin's criminal invasion is responsible for a significant increase in the price of gas, but over the past year, Biden's energy policies have delivered an even bigger hike in gas prices, an inconvenient truth that the majority of people understand. Both he and Psaki this week have tried, not too subtly, to insinuate that price gouging by oil and gas producers may also be to blame for sticker shock at the pump.

But in an ironic example of "spin versus spin," Psaki, later echoed by Biden, also tried to take credit for "record" oil production, telling reporters, "The U.S. produced more oil this past year than in President Trump's first year" and "next year, according to the Department of Energy, we will produce more oil ... than ever before."

Let's unpack this claim with some numbers.

In 2017, crude oil production, which for the most part still reflected the effects of Obama-Biden administration energy policies, reached 3.4 billion barrels, according to the Energy Information Administration. By 2019, with Trump administration energy policies operational, the country set the current record for U.S. oil production at 4.5 billion barrels, and [the U.S. became a net exporter of energy for the first time since 1952](#).

Biden's efforts to discourage production through more anti-drilling regulations and bureaucratic delays saw that record production in 2021 decrease to 4.1 billion barrels.

The same kind of misleading claims characterized much of the president's announcement despite his assertion once again that he was always going to be straight with the American people. Some fact-checking is in order, but the bigger problem isn't the manipulation of some statistics, or a spokesperson's dissembling. It is the growing suspicion that Biden's stubbornness has led to a "reckless disregard" of reality.

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