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Biden tours flood-ravaged New York and New Jersey

President Biden arrived Tuesday in areas of New York and New Jersey devastated by Hurricane Ida, pledging action to reduce carbon emissions and to protect Americans from the growing impacts of climate change. But, like his predecessors, Biden and the assemblage of Democrats joining him Tuesday offered nothing more than sound bites.

Biden's first stop Tuesday was to Manville, New Jersey, a town of 10,000 that has suffered from recurring and worsening floods over the past two decades. Manville was devastated by the remnants of Hurricane Ida as record rainfall overwhelmed infrastructure and inundated homes throughout the town, even leading to the explosion of one house. Across New Jersey, at least 27 people died, and several remain unaccounted for. Many drowned in cars on roads that were transformed into raging rivers during the storm.



President Joe Biden and New York Gov. Kathy Hochul tour a neighborhood impacted by flooding from Hurricane Ida, September 7, 2021, in Queens. At left is Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., along with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of N.Y. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

In Queens, Biden's next stop, floodwaters killed 10 in basement apartments and upended the lives of thousands more. The exorbitant cost of housing and crushing poverty in New York City have forced tens of thousands of working-class families, often immigrants, to take up residence in illegal below-ground homes with only one way in and out. The deaths are a striking illustration of the impacts of grinding social inequality, failing infrastructure, and worsening climate change.

After touring the destruction in Queens, Biden held a press conference flanked by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other representatives of the Democratic political establishment in New York.

"Folks, the evidence is clear," he said, repeating the Democratic Party line. "Climate change poses an existential threat to our lives, to our economy. And the threat is here; it's not going to get any better. The question: Can it get worse?"

Biden knows full well it can and will get worse. His recognition that "the nation and the world are in peril" echoes warnings by scientists for decades. Yet the Democratic Party in New York and nationally has refused to allocate the resources to build out the needed infrastructure to protect human lives, let alone fundamentally address climate change.

After a chorus of congratulations on issuing a disaster declaration, Biden touted his infrastructure plan as a remedy for the disastrous failures in New York, New Jersey and elsewhere around the country. Even if passed, the paltry bill provides just over \$579 billion in new infrastructure spending over eight years, a fraction of what is spent on the military annually.

The infrastructure challenges are monumental. In much of the Ida-ravaged areas of New York and New Jersey, the sewage and stormwater networks are more than a century old, designed at a time before much of the natural flood protection was paved over. It is

nowhere near sufficient in today's climate, at 1 degree C warming, let alone a future with 2 or 3 degrees warming.

The maintenance of these systems has been underfunded for decades. Street flooding is by no means limited to record-setting rainfall. Every year common summertime storms inundate streets and houses throughout New York City's five boroughs.

In the heart of American capitalism and the home of Wall Street, it cannot be said that this is due to a lack of resources. Unfathomable fortunes have been amassed through financial speculation and spent constructing *pieds-à-terre* in the clouds.

Biden's remarks Tuesday recapitulated the same talking points the Democrats have used for years. He pledged to "listen to the scientists," transition to net-zero emissions in the distant future and create good-paying green jobs.

The reality is that these pledges have amounted to nothing. The climate disaster is worsening, not improving. Far from a one-off, Biden's visit to New York and New Jersey piggybacked on his tour last week of Louisiana, where hundreds of thousands remain without power. Later this week, he will head to the West to survey areas ravaged by wildfire.

Biden's inability to offer any more than sound bites to address the climate crisis reflects the fact that the social order he speaks for, capitalism, is incapable of seriously addressing the problem. Stopping and reversing climate change would require the allocation of trillions of dollars in social spending in a massive coordinated global program.

There exists no solution to this crisis within the framework of the nation-state and the capitalist profit system. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that capitalist society cannot deal with the imminent threat of a global pandemic. It certainly cannot and will not sanction the massive allocation of resources and infringements on profit and property required by the global threat. Stopping and reversing man-made climate change requires the socialist transformation of society.

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