

Joe Manchin: Coal, Climate, and 'Common Sense'

<https://www.climateone.org/audio/joe-manchin-coal-climate-and-common-sense>

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Ariana Brocious: Hey, Greg, how have you been?

Greg Dalton: Good. Nice to see you, Ariana. Nice to see you too. It's been a while.

Ariana Brocious: You and I talk often, but listeners haven't heard your voice in a while.

Greg Dalton: It's been 18 years since I founded Climate One. I've been hosting it for most of that time, and I'm happily watching and listening on the sidelines as you and Koha and Austin lead some great engaging conversations.

Ariana Brocious: Thanks, and we have a really good one coming up today. But before we get into it, let's update listeners on COP 30, the 30th UN Climate Conference, which is wrapping up in Beem, Brazil.

Greg Dalton: At the time of this recording, we don't know everything that will be in the final communicate, but we do know a few things, and they're mostly about money.

Ariana Brocious: As we talked about in last week's show, the Baku to Beem roadmap calls for \$1.3 trillion per year to be mobilized to help developing countries transition to a cleaner economy.

Greg Dalton: That's a lot of money, but that's not all. The leaders of this summit launched a new tropical forest conservation fund. They're hoping to raise \$125 billion, and while the initiative has the backing of over 50 countries, it's hard to know how much money will appear and when.

Ariana Brocious: Similarly, there's been a lot of talk about tripling the amount of money flowing from rich countries to poor countries to pay for climate resilience.

Greg Dalton: Yeah. It's the rich countries that have caused this problem, and at these conferences, countries like to make bold new pronouncements and pledges, but then they're notoriously slow to actually cough up the money and follow through.

I was pleased to see a new declaration on information Integrity on Climate. This is over a dozen countries pledging to fight climate disinformation. Notably, the US was not one of them.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, the US didn't even send an official delegation to COP this year, which wasn't surprising given that President Trump has pulled out of the Paris Agreement for the second time,

Greg Dalton: and I've heard a lot of other countries are just fine with the US not being there.

That absence may make progress easier.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, we'll have to see, getting 200 countries to agree on anything is a challenge in the best of circumstances. So let's get on with today's show. I'm Arianna Brosius.

Greg Dalton: I'm Greg Dalton

Ariana Brocious: And this is Climate One.

[music change]

Greg Dalton: Ariana, when I say the name, Joe Manchin, what comes to your mind?

Ariana Brocious: The coal industry and obstructionist, I would say. He really made a lot of headlines for getting in the way of climate policy, at least for the first couple years of the Biden administration.

Greg Dalton: A lot of people have very complicated reactions to Joe Manchin. His no votes led him to become a villain in headlines. And when I posted on LinkedIn that I was going to talk with Senator Manchin, I got mostly pretty thoughtful suggestions of what I should ask him, et cetera. But I did get one person saying, why are you platforming this man? He's the, he's evil, et cetera. This is what we do on Climate One. We need to talk to everybody who have different positions on climate and not have this kind of purity test.

Ariana Brocious: And I do understand some of the frustration with Manchin, particularly from those in his own party. He stood in the way of extending the child tax credit that lifted millions out of poverty.

Greg Dalton: But he also extended subsidies to help people buy health insurance. Allowed Medicare to negotiate some drug prices and put a floor on taxes for large corporations. He did a lot of things that people forget 'cause they're so upset with him about climate.

Ariana Brocious: Yes. But speaking of climate, he stopped or rolled back a number of ambitious policy ideas like this grant system for utilities that could have fast tracked their transition to clean energy and kept consumer prices from ballooning. At a time when Democrats had the White House and Congress, he held back a lot of Democratic priorities,

Greg Dalton: all true. He was definitely a complicated figure, and his family made millions of dollars from coal according to the Washington Post. Not only does burning coal drive climate disruption, power plant pollution cause nearly half a million deaths in the US alone from 1999 to

2020, but the reality of politics, especially climate politics, are rarely that simple.

And on the show today, we'll hear Manchin explain his political decisions.

Joe Manchin grew up in the coal fields of West Virginia, the grandson of a miner, and the son of a small town grocer. And his worldview was shaped by a place where energy isn't an abstract policy debate. It's the identity of the community and vital for economic survival.

Ariana Brocious: After serving as a state legislator, secretary of state, and later governor, he entered the US Senate in 2010, quickly becoming one of the chamber's most conservative Democrats

Greg Dalton: fast forward to 2021 and in a 50 50 tied Senate, he was often the pivotal vote able to make or break national

Ariana Brocious: policy.

His positions often frustrated progressives, but his eventual support helped shape the largest climate investment in US history, the Inflation Reduction Act. Joe Manchin retired from politics in 2024. He's recently released a new memoir called Dead Center. In Defense of Common Sense,

Greg Dalton: I had the opportunity to sit down with Manchin and go beyond the caricatures to explore his upbringing, political instincts, and how his deep ties to an energy producing state helped shape the climate policy landscape we're all living in now.

We started the conversation with its first run for the US Senate in 2010.

Greg Dalton: You famously shot a rifle through the Waxman-Markey cap and trade bill on a campaign ad saying it was bad for West Virginia.

[Playback of that campaign ad]

Joe Manchin: I sued EPA. And I'll take dead aim at the Cap and Trade Bill. Because it's bad for West Virginia

Yet years later, you helped craft the biggest climate legislation this country's ever seen. What changed?

Joe Manchin: Never changed at all. Nothing changed. The bottom line was, is that the cap and trade, I never could get them to commit to using the resources they would've received by charging. You follow me? For, for carbon emissions revenue to be used for basically fixing the problem, every country that's ever done it BA used it for the social reforms. I just, uh, had always known that you had to have dispatchable energy. And dispatchable energy is 24 7. Coal was dispatchable, been used as dispatchable for years and years and years, and West Virginia is a big coal producing state. So I've been very familiar with that. Nuclear, I've always been a big supporter of nuclear, and I thought, you know, it's 24 7. Gas has replaced a lot of coal. I've told all of my, uh, my fellow West Virginians that, you know, there's not gonna be another coal-fired plant built. In America. With that, we had to make a transition. This is in the eighties and nineties, uh, that we had to go to low nox boilers, scrubbers, baghouses for Mercury. And then once we did all that, we found out when a CO2 is really a big problem. What do you do with that? And Greg, I'll tell you, I don't think this country's ever been committed towards basically finding a solution for CO2.

Greg Dalton: so you won that race, that ad was a thing, very effective. Uh, and you moved to

Washington and you moved on to a 65 foot trawler called almost heaven.

Joe Manchin: a big old steel trawler. It's no yacht

Greg Dalton: not a yacht, okay? and you, I heard you say you're not putting down roots. Uh, and so you could kind of pull up anchor and get out of Washington's as you, as you've done, you start your book talking about a moment where, uh, flotilla of protesters in kayaks pulled up and surrounded your home and they were pressing you to support President Biden's \$3.5 trillion...

Joe Manchin: They wanted the BBB.

Greg Dalton: Yeah. Build back better plan

Joe Manchin: Build back better. And lemme tell you, I, the thing I've said in the book was this, uh, I, I said, you know, when it comes down to it, you have to know. Where I came from, how I was raised, and I think we're all a product of our environment, of where we came from, how we were raised, and who raised us, Greg, and I was raised in the little coal mining community, Farmington, West Virginia, but people held you to be accountable for your actions and what you said. So I was always trained to understand that my words will have meaning. Those meanings will have actions or reactions, and I'll be responsible. Okay, so be careful. The other thing was, is that a work element? There's a work element in everything. My grandmother used to take care of anybody that was homeless. She'd keep everybody, she'd feed 'em, take care of 'em. She said, I got three rules. Can't cuss, can't drink, and you gotta work.

Greg Dalton: And people would show up at your house and stay in the basement.

Joe Manchin: They would stay in her, in her basement. And she made all these little kids cognizant that people had hard times, but there was rules. So I grew up with rules and there's nothing wrong with a work rule, and that BBB was giving everything away.

Greg Dalton: And so his, it was

Joe Manchin: It was just, just a total giveaway. And if it was a, if it was, if it would've cost the taxpayers a dollar, it was a \$10 trillion bill, because Bernie came to me one day and Bernie Sanders. I like Bernie, but we, we have different, different values and different ideas as far as policy, and I said. Bernie said. Now, Joey says, you know, I've cut this down from 6 trillion to 3 trillion. I cut it in half. I says, Bernie, you and I have been here for a long time now. You can't BS me because I know how the system works. Basically, we do everything in 10 year tranches. So you do a bill, you have to figure out how you're gonna pay for it and what you want. Well, this is what it would cost over 10 years. This is how we're gonna pay for it in 10 years. So, you know, if you did Bernie, you cut it from 10 to five or five or down to three, but you never cut any of the programs you were given away. And people aren't gonna let things go. Perfect example, what we're in the shutdown medical, we expanded. Unbelievable the, uh, subsidies.

Greg Dalton: You did that under, under the Inflation Reduction Act. You, you extended the Obamacare subsidies.

Joe Manchin: I'm the one who put it in a timetable. I said, are you people crazy? You gotta fix medical. Uh, our medical delivery system is broken. You know, we had people, no one understands. If you haven't lived in an areas where people are struggling and they're having low incomes and they're fighting and they wanna get off of welfare, but they're either on welfare and, and it kind of holds 'em in a generational welfare. And as soon as you do, you have a cliff. You hit that one magic number, let's say 25,000. You make a dollar over that. You lose all your benefits. And I kept trying to

tell 'em, I says, can't we develop a slope? And not a cliff to where you lose it all. Let a person work themselves into a livable wage. Help them as they get to that livable wage. They won't go back, but they can never get ahead. So common sense stuff that I kept trying to tell 'em. That's how I was raised. I watched people live their lives that way. And the Democratic Party was going so far to the left

Greg Dalton: and you famously went on Fox News and said, you're a no. You were not backing that Bill. And, and, uh, Joe Biden got pretty ticked off at you.

Joe Manchin: Pretty ticked off at me, but he has a right to get ticked off. But I was ticked off and I told him this. I said, Mr. President, you and I are the same vintage. You're a little bit older than me. We're the same vintage. I remember John Kennedy said, ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. I took that literally. I thought we all had to do this, a wonderful opportunity. Greatest country on earth been good to me and my family. What else? What can I do? Public service is a noble of all professions. I told him if I vote for this bill, BBB, and you pass it because of my vote. I says, you're changing and I'm helping you change the psychic of the nation to how much more can my country do for me? There are people today, Greg, still waiting for the next government check.

Greg Dalton: Right. And at that point you became vilified by your own party, um,

Joe Manchin: Uh, and well, it was a party. I never recognized, I probably should have left a lot long, lot, lot sooner than that, but it was just the values had changed so much. The Democratic party I grew up in was, they said, why were you a Democrat, Joe? I says, well, I guess my grandfather was a Democrat and just kind of heritage. You inherited this, but the bottom line was. He probably was so thankful that FDR gave him a chance to survive and feed their family and take care of them, and we, and very loyal to that. But you know what? The Democratic Party never tried to tell you what you were supposed to think and accept things that weren't valued. So the social, social became the big push. Democrats wanted to start pushing their social values on us. I said, my social value is this, the, the Constitution, basically the pursuit of happiness. It's something we guarantee, okay. In our and, and, and I said I'm gonna do everything I can to make sure that I protect your ability to pursue your happiness. Just don't make me believe because you have a certain thing that will basically make you happy. That I've gotta accept that or I'm, I'm out of the, out of the, uh, the queue, if you will. That's the difference.

Greg Dalton: telling you what pronouns to use

Joe Manchin: there you go

Greg Dalton: this word and not that word. So there's sort of that sort of purity police, that's that sort of thing. There's some research lately saying that actually voters pay a lot more attention to identity. Your grandfather, your father, grandfather. It's more about tribe than it is about issues. Do you think Democrats are too hung up on, you know, the issue, this issue that 'cause people. So research saying that people vote for Trump. They don't really necessarily know what his policy is, but he's kind of a disruptor and he's rich, et cetera. Do you think identity is more important than issues?

Joe Manchin: Well, we've gotten away from the issues from the stand. Government should be your partner. Government in a capitalist society and the freedoms that we have and the Constitution and the founding fathers, what they tried to do. It was never supposed to be your provider. That was not how we were. We were set a capitalized, capitalistic entrepreneurial system. Okay? But we had the compassion to take care of those who couldn't take care of themselves. Now, we've got maybe, how

did we get, so how do we expand with the pandemic so much that the BBB, well, we had to continue it. I said, can't we go back to where we were and then look at what had been indexed, how we've normally grown. This is an easy fix. No, We're the only country on earth in this great world of ours. We're the only country that shuts down when we have disputes. Not another country shuts down. They don't shut their doors, not another business shuts down when they have labor disputes, they all work through it. Not the United States of America, by God will shut down and go home and we'll still pay the people that's responsible for shutting it down. They're the only ones that get paid

Greg Dalton: Congress has still been paid. I put out a message on social media asking what I should ask you. Yeah. some people got mad at me for even talking with you. Oh, wow. Uh, you, how can you platform him? That sort of thing. But one thoughtful person suggested, um, what do liberals fail to understand about you?

Joe Manchin: First of all, uh, when you say liberals and how we identify, you're liberal, you're conservative, you're this, you're that. I just said, I just, it's common sense. I said, how do you live your life? You don't live your life from the extremes. There's nothing wrong with being a liberal, and there's nothing wrong with being conservative, but can't you work together to see if, can you be fiscally responsible and be socially compassionate? A little bit of this, a little bit of that. You have to be extreme. You have to take me clear to the far left. I can assure you where AOC, where Bernie, and that's not where the party, they're trying to identify the party as Mandani and all that. Uh, that's not where the party's going. That's not where this country is right now. Far left. And the country's not truly enamored with the far right. It might be more center. Right. But it's not there. A lot of the things that President Trump has done, people like. They don't like how he did it and how he continue to enforce it. That's the thing.

Greg Dalton: In early 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine roiled Energy Markets, you write about a tense encounter with Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer. And he said, you know, write an energy bill. So you did, uh, in that year of 2022. So what did you set out to do?

Joe Manchin: Well, I can tell you as soon as I saw what happened. Okay, now let's look. Let's look at the politics we're in. If people wanna look at me as what the, if they think Joe's just an opportunist because of politics. If I was an opportunist in my state, it'd been an easy thing to do. Just be Republican. You know

Greg Dalton: Would that have been hard for you? 'cause

Joe Manchin: it never entered in my mind. I never looked at me. I

Greg Dalton: sometimes wondered if you would flip. Like others have flipped.

Joe Manchin: They flip. I, I, I didn't think that being a D or an R would ever identify who I'm as a person. you have to be identified as a D or an R in order to operate the system we have, which I think is wrong too, and we'll talk about that. But I said that wouldn't, wouldn't make any difference. Republicans wouldn't like me any better. I'm not gonna kowtow to some of this stuff makes no sense. If I can't go back to my little town that I grew up with, a hardworking, good quality people and, and explain, I'm not gonna vote for it.

Greg Dalton: And so you shot through the cap and trade bill. You, Schumer says, write an energy bill, you represent,

Joe Manchin: Write an energy bill. And he says, I said, you got trouble shook. And that's Ukraine war. I says, Putin has weaponized energy.

Greg Dalton: Mm-hmm.

Joe Manchin: Our NATO allies. NATO was formed out in World War II at the end of World War ii. Its main purpose was only one thing to prevent another World War. That's it. Well then that mean we all worked together. We couldn't even help them 'cause we weren't producing energy that we should produce. Okay? So I'm thinking we have got to produce energy because I guarantee you our NATO allies will be looking at all the wrong places for energy.

Greg Dalton: So you thought US should export natural gas to get Europe off of Russian

Joe Manchin: But also we should do it clean. We were doing it cleaner and better than anybody in the world, but nobody in. But the hardcore environmentalist did not want us to do any type of extraction, any type of fossil. Well, that's unrealistic. 'cause you have to. We have nothing else yet. We're going to have fusion. I believe fusion will be the answer for the future. There's people who don't like nuclear either. We've run our whole military off of it for since 1950s, and we've done it very successfully. So I've said, okay, let's look at all the things we can do. So I wrote a bill that I thought was very balanced. My staff worked on it. Nobody knew we were doing it. We did it in secrecy because I wasn't gonna go through it. I went through with the BBB. Right. Okay. And I'm thinking, okay, this might not work 'cause they're not gonna like it. 'cause it's gonna make us produce more energy. We're gonna have to produce more oil, more gas. We're gonna continue to use our coal. But you have to do it with technology. And I've always said this, Greg, you cannot eliminate your way to a cleaner environment. No matter how much you think you can, you can't. You can innovate it through technology. Think about today, if we were able to work with India and show them how to use second and third generation of coal fired plants. They're using them anyway. They're using first generation. There's no baghouses, there's no scrubbers, there's no, uh, there's, there's low NOx boilers. They don't need to. They just want energy. Period. They don't care. So I said, okay, let's look at all of the things that we know that can be done.

Music: In

Ariana Brocious: Coming up, why did West Virginia's politics change so much?

Joe Manchin: You would think that they would be voting their pocketbook or be voting basically what's best interest for them and their family. They're voting social issues.

Ariana Brocious: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Ariana Brocious: Help others find our show by leaving us a review or rating. Thanks for your support!

Music: Out

Ariana Brocious: This is Climate One. I'm Ariana Brocious.

Let's get back to Greg's conversation with former Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. They discussed how the Inflation Reduction Act – the landmark climate legislation of the Biden administration – came to be.

Greg Dalton: This bill was amazing. It's really more carrots than sticks. There's a lot for nuclear, hydrogen. There's something in there, goodies in there for everyone.

Joe Manchin: Everything that technology has been. We knew that technology has been proven. It hadn't been matured. Hydrogen, we've had hydrogen forever. Right. Never could compete. We had geothermal, then we had SMRs coming on

Greg Dalton: small modular reactors. It's basically a tax bill. And if, if you did a blind taste test, it's a lot of things republicans would love, and yet no Republicans voted for

Joe Manchin: That's because we used the reconciliation,

Greg Dalton: Uhhuh

Joe Manchin: because Schumer believed that basically we don't need the Republicans. Do it yourself. I said, you're crazier in hell. Chuck. This system in the Senate was designed for the minority participation.

Greg Dalton: Are you saying you could have got it 60 votes to get the IRA through?

Joe Manchin: that Bill that I wrote in the IRA had as much Republican input as a democratic

Greg Dalton: right. Reed's like a Republican bill

Joe Manchin: Okay. Because I'd worked with him for five years on my committee.

Greg Dalton: So you're saying that reconciliation was a mistake. If it had gone for an actual vote, it might still be still standing today. 'cause Republicans wouldn't have tried

Joe Manchin: They, they, they

Greg Dalton: they would've been part of

Joe Manchin: That's exactly, and the biggest mistake I made is calling it the IRA, I should have called it the Energy Security Act of 2022.

Greg Dalton: Right? That, that confuses everybody. The IRA.

Joe Manchin: Well, the IRA was this inflation. Think about this. When this, when we did the bill, when they finally called me and said, you have anything? I said, I got something. I said, you're not gonna like it 'cause you're gonna have to produce more energy than you ever produced and you don't wanna produce anything. You want leases, you won't give leases out, you won't do anything you want. No oil, you want no gas, you wanna shut down all the coal plants. I said, you're not gonna like what I'm gonna do, but what I have done is give you a balanced bill that we can produce what we need, we can help our allies, and we can basically develop the energy we want for the future. And we can only do that through technology and we're doing it, but you have to incentivize. But they just couldn't, and they just wanted to accelerate what they wanted and to hell with what they didn't want. And that's where we went and

Greg Dalton: And you know, that bill, you know, had a lot of healthcare and tax provisions in there. They, they, in order to raise the money, there was, you know, increasing baseline corporation, 15% tax, extended the Affordable Care Act, uh, act subsidies.

Joe Manchin: everybody was paying 15% because the tax rate went from 35 to 21. And I said, well, let's just put a floor at 15 to make sure no one slides under us. Oh, they went nuts.

Greg Dalton: Yeah. There was a global effort

Joe Manchin: Oh, was there? Oh, they went nuts on that. So no corporations weren't paying 2, 4, 6, 8%.

Greg Dalton: zero

Joe Manchin: Uh huh. Oh, yeah. So I mean, we, we, that was a good bill. It really was. But like I said, you said, why did you call it that? IRA. Inflation was at 9% when they called me President Biden's, uh, ratings, uh, were down into the twenties, low twenties. Gas was at \$5. As soon as we passed that bill, immediately everything started coming down. Gas went back down to the three, four range. Okay. And the three 50 to three inflation came from nine to six to three. And so it did what it was supposed to do because we were producing. And on top of that, what you're saying about, we used a carrot not to stick. When I shot the cap and trade, all they had was a stick. They just wanted you to pay into it and they were gonna disperse the money how they wanted. So I wouldn't do that.

Greg Dalton: Yeah. Politicians like to be able to decide where money's gonna go. What's it like to see this all dismantled now, not only the healthcare

Joe Manchin: Well, that's wrong. It's so shortsighted from that standpoint because basically we have, if they'd have just stuck with the bill. But what happened? The Democrats couldn't accept the bill the way it was 'cause it didn't let them accelerate what they wanted. I wanted to get off. I didn't want to give the car manufacturers one penny of rebate. Okay. And I used analogy, I don't believe that we built the gas stations for Henry Ford when he had the Model T. Okay. It wasn't the government's part. The economy, if you believe in the market, it'll take over. We never give car manufacturers that started in 2008, 2009 with the crash, try to save the car industry. That was a big bell out. Okay? But they got most of their money back 'cause they had, they took stock. I understand all of that. So I said, listen, if this is the best product in the world, people will buy it. I said, you want \$7,500? The only way I'd do \$7,500 if we didn't have to rely on China. So I said, fine, 3750. If we basically secure the process, we secure it and do the processing. And then if we do the manufacturing, the other 3750 in America or in an allied country that we had free trade agreements with, so we could rely on the supply chain. Oh, they said, sure, we sign up. Soon as we signed the bill, they cut everything in half. Again, you could not trust them now. And I told the president, I says, your people and you, Mr. President, let them do this and it's wrong because we're still gonna be relying on China. My only reason to sign this bill was to get off of China, or, or you know, that we were depending on them.

Greg Dalton: no one was forced to buy an EV. It was, you know, an inducement. And the, the fossil fuel companies get lots of depletion allowances and lots of

Joe Manchin: yeah. All those,

Greg Dalton: So it's not like

Joe Manchin: they've all sucked off the trough. They've all,

Greg Dalton: it's not like this, this ev tax credit was, was the only thing, you know, you've talked about being compassionate and having empathy, um, and there's certainly a lack of that right now. The cruelty that's happening, taking away, you know, uh, food from hungry people and, and healthcare, et cetera. You write that true empathy can only be learned the hard way. I'd like to ask you about empathy arising from a difficult experience, traumatic experience in your life. When you

were 10 years old, you started working in your grandfather's store stock and shelves. Uh, one day when you were in college, that store burned to the ground and you, you showed up and your papa told you about seeing a salesman

Joe Manchin: We lost three customers and a salesperson,

Greg Dalton: And a child, uh, burned and you know, how did you feel going through that and how did that affect you, losing?

Joe Manchin: We lost everything. We had nothing. We had an insurance. I'll never forget, my dad thought he had insurance on everything, and he trusted the insurance salesman. And when the store burnt, the insurance salesman left town, never seen again.

Greg Dalton: Wow.

Joe Manchin: We lost. So we had nothing, and we started with nothing. So I quit school, went back to home, back to Farmington, tried to help my dad and my grandfather and everything. My grandfather was determined to open the grocery store back up and we, he, it was an old bank. It was a closed bank. Was closed right next door. So I'll never forget I was in there helping him. We were dynamite. That was safe. Try to get, blow the safe out the middle of the, the bank in order to build a store again. I'll never

Greg Dalton: I, and, and, and he what? Put a bunch of the money on the table and said, what if, whatever people need,

Joe Manchin: My dad told me, my dad and my mother for the first time had gone on a vacation when the store burnt down and he came back, we were there and he said, Joe, he said he called before he got home. He says, go up and see if you can find the safe and see, see if I think we have a little bit of money. Not much. He said, whatever we have. So that night I'm crawling up through the rubble. Trying to find the safe that fell down through the floor and I finally found the safe. I got into it and I got a box in there and every, I didn't know what was in it, so I took it home and dad opened up and I think it had to be maybe two, three, \$4,000 in it, and he called all the employees in. He put the money on the table, said, take what you need.

Greg Dalton: And you said, no, nobody was greedy.

Joe Manchin: Everybody took exactly what they needed. No more.

Greg Dalton: Uhhuh. right now in this country, the Trump administration is trying to disband or shrink FEMA, which is helps people when things

Joe Manchin: you're in trouble.

Greg Dalton: uh, those of us in the American West have seen a lot of fires. Paradise, Los Angeles, Altadena, and people are losing. Everything and climate change is accelerating these fires, they are hotter, they are fiercer, they are faster. It is warmer. Firefighters will say, this is not like any fire we've ever seen. So I'm curious how you can think about compassion for the thousands of people in the American West who went through what you went through.

Joe Manchin: Yeah. No, you have compassion. The bottom line is. Climate has an effect on everything. It has an effect on people that lose their jobs. It has an effect on the climate itself, how it affects people every way, shape and form. That has to be balanced out. Sometimes we swing too far one way, too far the other, and uh, I'm just, there's a balance to be had. Okay? And you have people

that are deniers. I said, lemme tell you, every one of us is responsible for the climate. We have had a part in playing it, and we have a responsibility, and we have the ability with technology and. Our abilities to find ways to cure this and to live in harmony if you can. That's our responsibility. But you just can't flip it overnight. What happens? You have the rebellion that happened when Barack Obama came in in 2008 and got elected and took office in 2009. Remember the war on coal? They said there was a war. We done gone. We'd gone through everything that they asked as far as, and these are the people back home that were working in the coal mines. They said they, they put scrubbers on. They changed the sulfur content and things of this sort, lost their jobs when all the things were, were basically, uh, demanding different product to be used. Went through all of that and then all of a sudden here he comes and says, we're gonna just go alto in renewables, he never considered. All the people that worked, basically produced the energy that saved this country, that built, you know, uh, made the steel, that built the guns and ships and everything else. These people were, were diehard patriots. I'm gonna tell you what I wanna explain to you, Greg. You wonder why the political shift had happened. He was basically putting benchmarks that were not feasible because technology wasn't there to let you hit it. And when Barack Obama said, go ahead and build a coal fire plant, we'll break you. He knew the technology wasn't there for carbon capture sequestration that was cost effective. They knew that. And so what we went through all that. Only, only thing I'm trying to say is this. coal has basically been segued out of the market. Coal right now. The only reason justification for coal, because it's a 24 7 dispatchable fuel, they can run 24 7 and they still need it for the energizing the grid. We know we're gonna demand more energy than ever before and you know what's going on. You see it here.

Greg Dalton: with AI is gonna change that though. In California, 2000 people a week install solar with batteries. Now batteries can be dispatchable power in a way that,

Joe Manchin: it's only 4, 5, 6 hours,

Greg Dalton: um, short term. There's some, some durations.

Joe Manchin: Yeah. The duration. So I tell people, if you want to do everything renewables right now, tell us what five to seven hours a day you want your energy. 'cause you have to have the backup of renewables. I mean of, of the,

Greg Dalton: California's doing that now in terms of like with the, the, the batteries have saved California's bacon recently with some really hot summers, et cetera, and batteries. The nice thing about batteries is if you can tap into people's cars, you don't have to have expensive grid. You know, it's like you can, you don't, the government doesn't have to pay or the utility companies don't have to build the

Joe Manchin: Well, here's another thing, Greg.

Greg Dalton: into your EV

Joe Manchin: We have a new - Form Energy is in Weirton, West Virginia, building the biggest batteries that iron batteries. They can go over a thousand megawatts for a hundred hours. They can back up an energy, a utility plant. It's unbelievable. Yeah. So we're going, this is what we did with the IRA Inflation Reduction Act. We were trying to have all these new technologies. We were trying to accelerate what we call maturing, so they would be matured enough to be able to carry the energy for the future.

Greg Dalton: So let's talk about that. You grew up in a coal mining community, you said idolizing coal miners for their hard and dangerous work. West Virginia has about 20,000 people directly

employed in coal mining industry. Says there's another 70,000 indirect jobs. West Virginia has. Also around 11,000 clean energy jobs last year. It's one of the fastest growing states in the country in terms of clean energy. So, you know, talk about that transition,

Joe Manchin: Well, we were doing everything the right, it was, we were going in the right direction as we transitioned. And then when the Trump administration comes in and starts cutting that down to the point where some of these things that we were trying to make

Greg Dalton: cutting the inflation

Joe Manchin: Yeah. Cutting a lot of the, a lot of the incentives And I, I told my Republican friends, I said, just change the name of the bill. Use the contents of what's in there. 'cause I can tell you it was done in a balanced way. Change a name, take, take ownership of it, and we're fine. We'll be praising you.

Greg Dalton: And a lot of these clean energy investments that happen from the Inflation

Joe Manchin: went into the red states.

Greg Dalton: went the red states went into red states. And so they're voting against their own interest of their own constituents. How's that gonna,

Joe Manchin: Absolutely, I don't

Greg Dalton: Explain that to me.

Joe Manchin: Well, I'm trying to tell you, that's why I try to tell the political parties, the social agenda pushes more people than what you think their economy or anything else with, you would think that they would be voting their pocketbook or be voting basically what's best interest for them and their family. They're voting social issues. They either like you or don't like you and you're trying to force a way of life they don't believe in.

Greg Dalton: It used to be that the, that people like you were sort of, or conservative. The right center was sort of fiscally conservative and socially progressive or liberal. Now that's flipped and Trump has figured out that his people are socially conservative and fiscally liberal. We can spend trillions on tax cuts and yeah, let the money flow.

Joe Manchin: A funny thing, I say this in the book, it says it to my grandfather, asked him one time, I said, Papa, what's the difference between a Democrat and Republican? And he said, oh, Joe. He says, not that much honey. He says, trust me, you put a pile of money in the middle of the table. They'll both spend it all. Now, our Republican friends will feel bad about it. But they'll both spend it all. They don't even feel bad about it anymore. No one feels bad about it. No one cares about \$38 trillion of debt and what it's doing to our country.

Greg Dalton: During the last year, the top 10 Americans, their wealth has increased by \$700 billion.

Joe Manchin: no excuse. There's no excuse.

Greg Dalton: 700 billion in one year. And people look at that, you can understand why people are voting for Mandani or like saying like, this is rigged. No, I understand. This is not the capitalism of the

Joe Manchin: Bernie and I, Bernie and I agree on a lot of things and that's one of 'em. Income

inequality, something's wrong when you have disproportion of worker, what they're making. Just take 30, 40 years ago, the ratio of difference of what CEO and a worker made.

Greg Dalton: Warren Buffet pays a lower tax rate than his secretary. And he is been

Joe Manchin: he said that, yeah. Yeah. He didn't offer, he, he didn't offer any solutions,

Greg Dalton: But what politicians ever gonna run except Mamdani saying like, it's hard to get elected saying, I'm gonna raise your taxes. That's not a popular campaign platform.

Joe Manchin: say you want fairness in the tax system. The system's not fair. It's just not fair. This 2017 tax cut, I mean, I didn't vote for it then. I didn't think it was fair then. I didn't think it's fair to extend it now.

Greg Dalton: could we go back to even Obama or even Clinton there at

Joe Manchin: take, no, forget Obama Clinton is the only one under Erskine Bowles and John Casey. They were the architects under Newt Gingrich at that time, John Kasik working in the Congress. They were in the majority, and you had Erskine Bowles who was running it for President Clinton. They put a tax plan together that not only. Was fair. It basically spun off balanced budgets, surpluses, and we'd have been debt free by 2006,

Greg Dalton: and Clinton left with a surplus, right?

Joe Manchin: They produced surpluses four years. We were \$6 trillion in going down in debt. And uh, and there were people afraid, oh my God, if we're debt free in this country, what are we gonna do? They were afraid of that, some of the top people. And then what happened is we had 911 happen. Declared two wars, never paid for first time we ever done that. And the extensions and then when then, uh uh, then we went like from going this direction, 6 trillion, then like a rocket shot up the 10 trade and it kept going. And then you had Obama come in, I was there. They had two tax cuts under Bush. They could have let those go back. Just don't say a word, right? Oh no. He had to say Anybody making less than two \$50,000 will not be affected. Okay. And then Biden comes in. Anybody making less than 400,000 won't be affected. Then the Republicans come in and give, well, we'll give more tax rates because these people are still, you know, they didn't, they didn't get that break at 400,000 or 250. The bottom line is there's no fairness to the system and there's no rhyme or reason how we can have disproportionately that wealthiest people living in one country.

Greg Dalton: And I think we're never gonna solve climate until we sort of get that democracy right, because of the concentration of wealth and the concentration of power. And we talk about the invisible cost of the national debt.

Joe Manchin: I'll never forget in 2011, I'm setting in armed services committee and then an armed service committee. Here comes, uh uh, my first committee meeting and we had all the joint chiefs of staff and Mike Mullin, Admiral Mullin was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I asked him What's the greatest threat United States America faces? I'm thinking he's gonna talk about military, whether it be China's aggression, Russia or Iran, North Korea. They're all weaponized with, uh, nuclear and what we're gonna do. He said, don't worry about another country taking us over militarily. We'll take ourselves down because of the debt of a nation. And he was right. Most nations have fallen because of debt. Roman Empire fell. They've all fallen.

Music: in

Greg Dalton: Coming up, another West Virginian wants solar power to be part of the state's proud

energy legacy.

Thomas Ramey: We are just a different version of an energy provider. We're an energy miner versus a coal miner. And we do have a lot of former coal miners who work with us.

Greg Dalton: That's ahead, when Climate One continues.

Music: out

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. In my conversation with Joe Manchin, former Senator from West Virginia. He told me he's concerned about the state of the country.

Joe Manchin: I'm more worried than I've ever been in the history of my, of my life that I can think back on and all the history that I've read about. I'm more concerned now. We've got too much misinformation. We're not doing anything to round in the social platforms. We're not holding them accountable whatsoever for what they put on. Anybody can go on there anonymously and say anything they want to and, and unless you hold those platforms that give you a voice and give you a place to get your your voice out. You shouldn't be able to say, first Amendment to constitution, freedom of speech. You can't say anything you want.

Greg Dalton: But those companies are now building this east wing of the White House

Joe Manchin: building that and they're how? How about the ai? You think the Internet's been dangerous at times? There's been an awful lot of good that was done by the internet. A awful lot of economy was done by the internet. A lot of damage has been done. Also, that's a drop in a bucket compared to what AI could do to us.

Greg Dalton: And it's a hu it's a climate time bomb too. The energy suck of AI is gonna

Joe Manchin: So, uh, we're gonna, yeah. And we, uh, we've got to find a way to, to harness this. And it's just a, everyone's, everyone has to figure out, okay, I'm an American, I'm not a Democrat, I'm not a Republican, I'm an American. You might have different ideas of how you want to govern yourself, and whether it's a Mamdani, everybody's scared to death or trying to put, that's the face of what's gonna happen. Once the people have spoken and the process is our democracy is formed on our founding fathers thinking, we could this experiment or we could govern ourself. Well by governing yourself, you either have to run yourself and says, I know what my citizens want, or you have to elect somebody that you want to represent you. The people have spoken. The people of New York have spoken. Let's give this man a chance. I wouldn't have voted for him, but let's give him a chance. I will do everything I could. Now, if he would call me and say, Joe, what do you think about this? I want him to succeed, but I would speak truth to power. Okay? So I'm not rooting for him to fail. I'm rooting for anybody that gets elected through the process to succeed. So when I'm in the senate. I'm not opposed to anybody. You got a problem. These, you're representing Nebraska, Kansas, whoever you're representing, I want to help you, but let's work together. I can't harm the people I represent by helping you unless we find out is there a balance to be had. They're not even having this discussion anymore. Greg. They're not sitting down. that boat of mine. That boat was the only re that was the only, the only safe haven that we had that I could bring people down and have dinner and make 'em sit there. And we talked to each other. I saw things happen on that boat. We made more legislation there. We made the capitol. So Almost Heaven was truly a respite to where you could go and have. Be able to speak, be who you wanted to be and speak to people you couldn't speak to because you were guilt by association. Then you become guilt by conversation and you

were afraid to be seen working with the other side. That's not the other side, that's not the enemy on the other side, I can tell you where the enemies are and it's not the Republican party or if you're a, it's not the Democratic party. This is the way you can solve the problems in America. Your enemies are outside. They want you to fail. They want to do harm to you. And as long as you keep all this discourse going on, they figure they're doing a pretty good job. You wanna know why West Virginia changed, and I'm talking about they went from 75% registered Democrats to 80% registered Republicans in a 10 year period. You wanna know the reason they all told me this is union workers. United Mine workers. This is factory workers. These are workers.

Greg Dalton: strong, former or stronghold of the Democrats.

Joe Manchin: That was it. I mean, they were the strongest of the stronghold of Democratic Party. They said, Joe, the Democratic Party in Washington DC spends more effort, more resources, and more time with people that are able bodied, capable of working, that don't work or won't work than those of us who do in the hell with them.

Greg Dalton: But that's sort of this myth of the makers and the takers, like the, the, the welfare queens,

Joe Manchin: All I can do is tell you what they believe.

Greg Dalton: I have an alternative theory, which is how the Democratic Party got astray, which is there's a industry of consultants who make a ton of money off of candidates and with polls and consultants and steer people in a certain way, and their interest is in revenue.

Joe Manchin: I grew up, I grew up in the fifties and sixties with a Democratic party that basically cared about, do you have a good job? Is it safe where you're going to work? Are you getting paid properly? Do you have benefits? All the things that we needed to basically have a quality of life. That's what they cared about. They didn't care about who you loved. They didn't care about any of this other, they got to the point now where they're trying to be almighty and tell us everything. I said, you can do, you can. Sexual preference. I don't care about any of that, but just don't make me believe I'm supposed to believe it too.

Greg Dalton: When you, uh, did a conversation with David Axelrod, um, at the Commonwealth Club where we're based, and he said that coastal Democrats approach people in other parts of the country like sociologists. I'm here to help you become more like me.

Joe Manchin: When John Kennedy ran in 1960 for president and that if it wasn't for West Virginia, he had never gotten elected president. He had to beat Hubert Humphrey there because of his religion. Religion was a big factor at that time. And we're the, we're the, we're the least diverse state in the nation. We're the whitest state in the nation and we're the least Catholic state in the nation. And I'm an ethnic Catholic. My family's background's Italy and Czechoslovakia, and we're Catholic. And, uh,

Greg Dalton: you got lots of Catholic guilt. I know.

Joe Manchin: I never, I, I told Barack Obama one time, I told him, he said, Joe, he said, my demographics don't work well in your state. And I said, Barack, my demographics don't work well in my state, but if they get to know you, they're the greatest people on earth. Just come and spend a little time.

Greg Dalton: Well, I appreciate your ability, uh, and willingness to talk to people across divide. I wish we had more of that in this country. Uh, 'cause it's, it's tearing us apart.

Joe Manchin: And I've told people on climate or anything they wanna talk about, I said, listen, we can find areas of how we're moving, first of all to go after me the way they've had, the way they have. And then to see that I was the only one that was able to write a bill that gave them more of a pathway forward, that we had a chance to transition into a clean energy policy portfolio. I want clean water. I want clean air, I want everything, but I want people to have a job. And as we transition, you don't leave them behind. When you leave a person behind you says, well, we're just gonna change. Well, what about me? Uh, this is where I grew up. This is where I live. I raised my kids. Can, can we not find something here for us? And I will give Joe Biden credit. He gave credits. As we transition out, you bring a company in to a coal area or where you're trying to transition. He gave us incentives to move, to move the needle, if you will.

Greg Dalton: Joe Manchin is a former US Senator from West Virginia, an author of the new book, *Dead Center* and *Defense of Common Sense*

Joe Manchin: It tells it all.

Greg Dalton: Thank you Senator Manchin for coming on *Climate One*.

Joe Manchin: Thank you. Great. Great to be with you.

[music out]

Ariana Brocious: West Virginia is probably best known for its coal industry, but clean energy is growing faster there than in many other states. Thomas Ramey works for a company called Solar Holler. They are focused on building solar projects in Appalachia. Last year, Greg spoke with Ramey about those efforts.

Thomas Ramey: I grew up in a very small coal mining community, up in Southern West Virginia, It's a very close knit community where people know each other. It's not the kind of place where people just live along the road and they happen to see each other at Walmart or somewhere. people would know the sound of your truck and they would know your family. And if you did something you shouldn't have done before you would get home, everybody in the area would know what you had done.

Greg Dalton: Sounds lovely and a little, little worrying. Yeah, depending

Thomas Ramey: a little bit of both.

Greg Dalton: What's it like there now? Outside the region, we hear a lot about, you know, war on coal, et cetera, that changed. What's it like there now?

Thomas Ramey: So, uh, due to just coal becoming more difficult to access, uh, most of the easier to access coal has already been gotten. So, we see a decline in the number of active coal mines and we see a decline in the number of individuals working in those areas. And as technology continues to advance, fewer and fewer people are employed in that sector. So it's a sad situation across some of the Appalachian counties, especially in Eastern Kentucky and Southern West Virginia. Schools are closed. Businesses are closed. Lots of houses are empty. There's still a lot of people in those areas, uh, people that have a great connection and roots, and they're fighting to make those areas the best possible places to live and remain and call a home. But it's economically, it's, it's a, it's a difficult area.

Greg Dalton: You said your dad worked in a mine. I believe your grandfather did also. Tell me about what kind of jobs they had and how did working in coal affect them?

Thomas Ramey: Yeah. So my dad, uh, retired from being a deep miner. He, uh, has a portion of his lungs that's affected by black lungs. My grandfather retired from the coal mine several, several years before my dad started. So it was a different level of care and, uh, they didn't wear the masks and things like they should have to protect themselves. So my grandfather ended up being, uh, diagnosed and having a, uh, very, advanced form of black lungs that eventually resulted in him not being able to, uh, to continue on with us, and he passed away as a result, which was super tough, um.

Greg Dalton: What was that like for you watching your grandfather?

Thomas Ramey: It was extremely, uh, painful to, uh, to watch someone that you respect and you love, just struggle to, uh, to catch a breath. If you would see him, you would think, wow, he's physically fit. And, uh, he, he was a slim person, wasn't overweight, did not smoke, but just to walk across a room in his later years, he would be out of breath and had to use oxygen pretty often. So it was, it was tough for the entire family to, to witness.

Greg Dalton: Oh, I'm sorry. That must be rough. It's grandpa that you look up to so much to see him that way. Did you ever consider following your grandfather and dad into the mines?

Thomas Ramey: No, from an early age. And I think partially because my father was active with the UMWA and he was very active with just trying to fight for better wages and, and benefits. I was exposed to a picket line at a very young age, so I, I was able to quickly get the, uh, passion of social justice. And so I started in the, uh, the path of just doing things for the community and, um, ended up before I came to Solar Holler, was directing a homeless veteran program for the region and ended up going solar at my home. And, uh. I was extremely happy with the outcome that ended up transitioning over and deciding that I could still do social justice work, but I could do it from this perspective and do it from helping my neighbors and, uh, them save money, but also help the environment at the same time.

Greg Dalton: So what do your friends in coal think about you, your advocacy, and particularly your Solar Holler work?

Thomas Ramey: So I think it at first because, solar five years ago, even though solar hauler has been around for 10, solar wasn't really talked about a lot across the coal fields and, uh, It was seen a lot when it was talked about as just an environmental slant and it was those people from somewhere else that was coming here to tell us what to do. Slowly over the years, the area has embraced the idea that West Virginia and this region has always been a leader when it comes to energy across the nation. And this is just another way for us to look at that. We don't have to limit ourselves as Mountaineers and Appalachians to traditional ways. And while we see so many of our young people have to leave after graduating high school or college, this is a way for us to finally tap into something that is meaningful, that will give them a wage that they can afford to have a great life and that they'll stay here. I work with municipalities, school systems, businesses and non profits, and most of the conversations around going solar with That group focuses on the financial impact and due to traditional electric rates continually going up and businesses and individuals being pushed to the limit of being able to afford to pay their bills month to month, it's opened up people's eyes to at least give it a chance.

Greg Dalton: So you go in dollars and cents money. It's not about environment or virtue or, you know, polar bears.

Thomas Ramey: It's not. But for me, I always keep the conversation around the bottom line and the ways they can save money and what that money could be used for in their nonprofit or their

business.

Greg Dalton: I watched one of your videos and I got a lot of sense of pride and I, this term I love, sun miners. Tell me about that.

Thomas Ramey: Yeah, we wanted to make sure we, we showed the area that we truly respect the history and the heritage of the coal miners and all of the sacrifices that were made. And we are just a different version of an energy provider. We're an energy miner versus a coal miner. And we do have a lot of former coal miners who work with us. Coalfield Development, which was a partner early on, is a group that goes into the coalfields and works to rejuvenate the economy. And they did a training program for us. So we did an aggressive push early on to find out-of-work coal miners to come into the, the workforce with us. And, um, that's been a really good partnership.

Greg Dalton: I think people outside the region don't understand the pride that people have for sort of powering America's iconic, you know, with building the Empire State Building, that sort of thing. Yeah, I think it's a little hard for me outside to understand that pride, Yeah, and even as someone who grew up in West Virginia, it's sometimes hard for me to wrap my head around.

Thomas Ramey: The, the intense support and love of Cole. Um, but I think that that is in place a lot because of what I watched even my grandfather go through. We have watched so many of the people in our families and our loved ones sacrifice so much. So it's almost a love hate relationship.

Greg Dalton: Um, I've heard, um, I think it might have been Barbara Kingsolver who talked about Appalachia as kind of a domestic sacrifice zone, you know, that sort of it's like an internal colony, kind of this area where people, outsiders don't care about the people or the land, but you're doing stuff that helps us in our cities. So thank, you know, maybe not even thank you. Just yeah.

Thomas Ramey: And you would probably not imagine West Virginia as a place where you have school systems and cities and county governments aggressively pursuing solar, but it's happening. Wayne County schools in West Virginia signed a power purchase agreement with us. There's no financial obligation from the school system other than buying the electric from us at a reduced rate. They're going to save 150,000 a year by doing that. And for a school system that continues to see less and less financial benefit from coal, this is a good way for them to start filling some of the budget shortfalls. Well, one of the other things that, that does help us. And, and mentioning Wayne County, it's important that helps us to, uh, have the pipeline from the schools to Solar Holler. We have apprenticeship programs with some of the high schools in the county school systems and Wayne County Schools happens to be one of those. And so we're getting those students at 11th and 12th grade that begin working with us. And they're able to transition once they graduate to work full time for us. So, the coolest part of the Wayne County Schools going solar They're going to have some of their own students on their own buildings, helping us install and, uh, solarize their buildings.

Greg Dalton: So is that displacing coal?

Thomas Ramey: It is. And unfortunately, with multi story buildings, a lot of times you can't offset 100 percent but we are offsetting a very large percentage of the traditional electric they would have been getting. So yes, they're still going to buy a portion of the electric from the grid, which will be coal produced, but um, a large chunk of their electric now will come from the sun.

Greg Dalton: You have a brother and brother in law and a few uncles still actively working in coal. What did your family think when you first told them you're going to work in solar?

Thomas Ramey: Well, they, they thought I was crazy to leave the position I was in working with the

homeless veterans to go into the solar field, but they didn't understand the technology. They didn't understand the savings. They didn't understand the growth in the industry. So how did I create a pathway for them to, to see that it was a good move. what I did was I had went solar on my own home. I was able to monitor the production from my own system on my home. It's a 15 minute interval data upload of how much you're producing versus how much the home is using. I gave my family members that were the most skeptical access to that, and my dad being one of them. And soon after he monitored for a couple months, he reached out to Solar Holler to go solar himself.

Greg Dalton: So the data convinced your dad?

Thomas Ramey: Yep. He is a very hard numbers guy. He wanted to see that it actually worked. And now he not only believes it, he hands my cards out and talks about solar all the time.

Greg Dalton: Thomas Ramey, thank you so much for sharing your insights on Solar Hollar and your personal story.

Thomas Ramey: No problem. So good to meet you.

Music: In

Greg Dalton: And that's our show. Thanks for listening. You can see what our team is reading by subscribing to our newsletter – sign up at [climate one dot org](https://climateone.org).

Ariana Brocious: Climate One is a production of the Commonwealth Club. Our team includes Greg Dalton, Brad Marshland, Jenny Park, Austin Colón, Megan Bisciegli, Kousha Navidar and Rachael Lacey. Our theme music is by George Young. I'm Ariana Brocious.

Music: Out