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Manchin Gets Coal Association Endorsement, Libertarian Praise

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Manchin received praise from the two groups Thursday.

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CHARLESTON -- Gov. Joe Manchin received accolades from two groups Thursday that have the potential of defusing some of the main arguments Republicans are using against him as he seeks a seat in the U.S. Senate.

First, the West Virginia Coal Association endorsed Manchin during a press conference in Charleston, saying he has consistently taken a stand against what it describes as President Barack Obama's attack on the coal industry. Manchin attended the event.

Second, the Cato Institute of Washington, D.C., a libertarian think tank, named Manchin one of the nation's most fiscally responsible governors. He was only one of four governors to receive an "A" from the organization and the only Democrat among the four.

Both come at a critical time for Manchin. Recent polls have shown him in a statistical dead heat against Republican businessman John Raese. The GOP has put much effort into trying to tie Manchin to Obama – particularly Obama's energy policies – so Manchin and association officials spent a good part of the news conference pointing out the differences. "We have witnessed this governor put his finger in the chests of EPA officials and say that jobs mean more in West Virginia than what you're objecting to and not giving us the permits," WVCA Executive Director Bill Raney said.

Raese and Republicans have alleged that electing Manchin would be bad for coal, pointing law championed by the governor that requires the state to get a quarter of its energy from renewable or alternative sources by 2025. GOP critics claim it a "mini cap-and-trade" laws, but the WVCA – which represents much of the coal industry – said that was not an accurate description of it. Raney specifically pointed to provisions allowing the use of "clean coal" technologies to meet the requirement, suggesting they might actually increase coal use.

As far as the Cato report, the authors wrote "the state economy has done well under his fiscal policies of business tax cuts and relatively frugal budgeting."

Perhaps one of the ironies in Cato's analysis is that Manchin is seeking the seat of the late Sen. Robert C. Byrd, who directed to the state billions of dollars in "pork-barrel spending" that Cato and other fiscally conservative organizations decry.

Manchin said the federal government needs to "put its financial house in order" just like the state did under his administration.

When asked if he would stop the earmarking Byrd was famous for, Manchin said people saw very little earmarking under his administration, with the money instead going to infrastructure. He noted Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Franklin D. Roosevelt invested heavily in infrastructure to spur the economy, but much of the recent stimulus money has been used to instead shore up failing state governments.

Manchin also said he wouldn't blame previous administrations for the problems of today – an allusion to the current administration blaming President George W. Bush for the country's financial state.

"I'm going up there with the attitude that we got to fix this, and I guarantee we can reach across the aisle and get'er done," he said.

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