



Manchin a soldier for Obama

George Moore May 4, 2013

If there was ever any doubt that Joe Manchin would turn into a good soldier for President Barack Obama, doubt no more.

As you may recall, Sen. Manchin, D-W.Va., ran away from the top of the ticket in 2012. The strategy worked. Statewide, Manchin captured 60.5 percent of the popular vote. The president won only 35.5 percent. (In Randolph County, it was 62.2 percent Manchin, 34.26 percent Obama.)

The senator, thus assured of a job for the next six years, wasted no time changing stripes.

On Feb. 5, 2013, he appeared on the national stage as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee looking into Benghazi. Leon Panetta, outgoing secretary of defense, and Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, testified.

Manchin was in the spotlight for approximately seven minutes, and his only question about the attack was for Panetta. "Did something break down, sir, that we can repair?"

Panetta: "I think there was. We didn't have the intelligence that would have given us a heads-up that this kind of thing was going to happen. And that is something that we do need to pay attention to."

Manchin could easily have challenged Panetta, but he let him slide. He said, "My time is up. Thank you both."

The senator also went mushy on Fox News Sunday last weekend. When host Chris Wallace asked about the Boston Marathon bombing, Manchin said he would have liked to see the interrogation of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, 19, continue under the public safety waiver.

But when asked specifically whether Obama's Justice Department erred in filing criminal charges, Manchin avoided a direct answer.

He was similarly evasive on Obama's "red line" in Syria. Wallace asked, "What do you make of the fact that the president seemed to set this marker, Assad stepped over it, and now, he's backing away?" Again, Manchin avoided a direct answer.

The senator also has been carrying Obama's water on gun control.

Manchin and Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., were the front men on a background check amendment co-sponsored by Sen. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., and gun-control advocate Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. Manchin had the blessing of the president and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

Manchin worked hard to sell the complicated amendment as gun-rights friendly. He reportedly even treated fellow senators to food and beverage aboard the Black Tie, a yacht partially owned by Manchin.

The amendment was announced on April 10 and pushed to a vote in the usually deliberative Senate a week later. It went down 54-46, six votes shy of the required 60. Five Democrats voted "no"; 16 Republicans voted "yes."

Manchin served up a plateful of explanations but never blamed himself or his amendment.

There was distrust and manipulation from the get-go, and both Toomey and Manchin downplayed Schumer's role in what some renamed the Toomey-Schumer-Manchin amendment.

Heritage Action, a conservative advocacy organization and sister to the Heritage Foundation, also said in an email, "Legislation drafted behind closed doors and rushed to the Senate floor has no place in our political system."

The amendment itself had plenty of critics, including David B. Kopel, an associate policy analyst at the Cato Institute. He concluded that it was "badly miswritten" and contained "major advancements for gun control."

Kopel said the provision claiming to outlaw national gun registration "in fact authorizes a national gun registry."

Manchin is not dissuaded. He says he'll plow on, and he reportedly has asked dissenting senators to suggest changes in Toomey-Schumer-Manchin.

That raises an interesting question.

If Toomey-Schumer-Manchin was so great to start with, as Manchin has said all along, then why would he even consider changes, let alone solicit them?

The answer, of course, is that the amendment wasn't so great to start with.

Carrying Obama's water must be hard work.