The Biden administration has said a vast spending bill is set to result in the “largest effort to combat climate change in American history”, with hundreds of billions of dollars set to be funneled into supporting clean energy, electric vehicles and new defenses against extreme weather events. But some key parts of Joe Biden’s original plan were left out.

Following negotiations with Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema, two centrist Democratic senators who have opposed large portions of the original Build Back Better bill, the White House said it was confident a reduced version of the legislation will be able to pass both houses of Congress and will “set the United States on course to meet its climate goals”.

Oliver Milman in New York
@olliemilman
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Joe Biden with the energy secretary, Jennifer Granholm, in September. The White House said the legislation will cut planet-heating emissions by 1bn tons by 2030. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images
This proposed framework includes $555bn in incentives, investments and tax credits aimed at bolstering the deployment of renewable energy such as solar and wind, as well as a tax break that will deliver up to $12,500 to people who buy an electric car. The bill will help deploy new electric buses and trucks, build community resilience to disastrous wildfires and floods and employ 300,000 people in a new “civilian climate corps”.

In all, the White House said the legislation will cut planet-heating emissions by 1bn tons by 2030 and bring the US significantly closer to its goal of slashing carbon pollution in half this decade.

At a press conference held on Thursday, Biden said the bill will represent “the most significant investment to address the climate crisis ever” and “will truly transform this nation”.

“We are going to get off the sidelines of manufacturing solar panels and wind farms,” the president said, adding that the package will help double the number of electric cars on US roads within three years and provide 500,000 new charging stations for the vehicles. “We are once again going to be the innovators. It’s a big deal.”

“The weather is not going to get better, it’s going to get a heck of a lot worse,” Biden continued. “It’s a blinking code red for America and the world.”

The legislation has been significantly reduced following objections raised by Manchin and Sinema over its scope – Biden needs every Senate Democrat to vote for the bill to overcome unified Republican opposition to it – but the remaining framework still represents the first, and largest, major attempt by the US to tackle the unfolding climate crisis.

“It’s a historic day for people and the planet,” said Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters. “Congress must swiftly pass the Build Back Better Act and send it to President Biden to sign into law.”

On Thursday, Biden will travel to Europe for crucial UN climate talks to be held in Scotland. The US president has said it would be “very, very positive” for the reconciliation bill to pass before the Cop26 summit, in order to bolster American credibility and help convince other countries to do more to
address the catastrophic wildfires, floods and heatwaves increasingly being unleashed by global heating.

This effort has been repeatedly stymied by the objections of Manchin, a West Virginia senator with deep ties to the coal industry who managed to strike out of the bill a system that would have phased out fossil fuels from America’s electricity grid. This plan was responsible for a third of the emissions cuts in the original version of the legislation, according to analysts.

The new framework does not include fees paid by oil and gas producers when they emit methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Manchin was also opposed to this fee in the original bill and rejected a proposal to include a tax or price on carbon emissions. The Environmental Protection Agency is, however, poised to regulate methane emissions through its existing powers.

These omissions mean that the legislation’s framework represents a historic investment in clean energy but doesn’t include any mechanisms to reduce fossil fuel usage or even cut subsidies flowing to the oil, coal and gas companies that have caused the climate crisis.

“Given the prime opportunity to cancel billions of dollars in domestic subsidies for oil and gas polluters, the president and congressional leadership have rolled over,” said Mitch Jones, policy director of Food and Water Watch. “A climate plan that fails to directly confront the oil and gas industry cannot possibly be considered meaningful.”

Climate experts have, however, pointed out the bill, if passed, would represent a major step forward in acting on the climate crisis, while making clear that further emissions cuts will be needed to avoid the US, and the world, spiraling into a barely livable climatic state.

Leah Stokes, a climate policy expert at the University of California, Santa Barbara, said it would be “great news” if the legislation passes because “the climate math is brutal”.

“Even if we are lucky enough to get this bill over the finish line, we need more next year,” she tweeted. “The climate clock is ticking.”