**Audio Transcript**

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**Nate Hegyi: Taylor, did you ever read the Onion?**

**Taylor Quimby: Oh yeah. Especially with big news events, they always have the best take.**

**Nate Hegyi: For those listeners who don’t know, it’s a satirical news outlet. I think it’s hilarious. About a decade ago their target was Vice President Joe Biden. They essentially painted him as this mess of a dude.**

**Headlines included, “Shirtless Biden Washes Trans Am In White House Driveway.”**

**Taylor Quimby: “Biden Loses Control Of Butterfly Knife During Commencement Speech” – that’s my favorite.**

**Nate Hegyi: I love that one. “Biden hitchhikes to Democratic National Convention:**

*Onion Video: He told me all a man needs is a bench to lie on and a cold one to nurse him to bed. I said it might be a little dangerous out there on the road. He said he was carrying his butterfly knife and that he just got his green belt in Taekwondo.*

**Taylor Quimby: He’s the closest a president has ever come to being the Fonz.**

**Nate Hegyi: He does have a vibe. He wears aviators a lot. He’s got a car collection. There’s a video of him doing burnouts with Jay Leno in his 1967 Chevrolet  Stingray.****Taylor, do you get ‘I’m going to tackle the climate crisis’ vibes from this version of Joe Biden?**

**Taylor Quimby: No. I get like, ‘I’m going to hit Route 66”**

**Nate Hegyi: Exactly. He feels like the Democrats of old. All about blue-collar jobs and unions. But during his 2020 campaign, Biden’s website called him a climate change pioneer.**

**He actually promised a clean energy revolution. Carbon-neutral by 2050. More electric cars, solar and wind farms – way less fossil fuels.**

*Joe Biden: We can and we will solve the crimate- the climate crisis. And we’ll build back better than we were before.*

**Nate Hegyi: These were big promises made during a pivotal moment in the world’s efforts to curb the worst impacts of climate change. Now that Biden has announced his reelection campaign, I wanna know… how is he doing?**

**Taylor Quimby: How you doing**

**Nate Hegyi: How you doing Joe?**

**Taylor Quimby: Eyyyyyyy….**

*President Biden: C’mon let’s do this, I’d like to do that…*

**Nate Hegyi: I’m Nate Hegyi…**

**Taylor Quimby: and I’m Taylor Quimby…**

**Nate Hegyi: And today on Outside/In we are gonna find out whether Biden is holding true to his promises on climate change. What’s he doing right, where is he catching flack, and should Biden be an Octopus or a Bighorn sheep?**

**Taylor Quimby: I didn’t know we were doing roleplay here in this episode, Nate?**

**Nate Hegyi: This is Outside/In, man. Gotta bring in the animals. But trust me the metaphor will make sense soon. Stay tuned.**

**I remember like twenty years ago we talked about how climate change was this big, scary thing that was coming our way, right? It was like a dark storm in the distance. It was all melting ice caps, Al Gore powerpoints.**

**But the climate crisis definitely feels here now, right? I was wearing a t-shirt and shorts back in April. It hit 90 degrees… in Montana!**

**Taylor Quimby: Oh my God, same here. And we did not get a lot of snow in New Hampshire this year. It felt… it was creepy.**

**Nate Hegyi: No big surprise, but in order to stop the climate crisis from getting much worse, experts say we need to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible.**

**Countries can do that by revamping two big sectors of their economy – transportation and power generation.**

**They account for two-thirds of all greenhouse gas emissions because they mostly rely on fossil fuels.**

**Taylor Quimby: Which is obviously a world-wide problem but the U.S. is one of the biggest contributors. So yeah, we have an outside slice.**

**Nate Hegyi: Experts say the next few years are going to be pivotal if we want to keep warming below 2 degrees celsius. So this is where Joe Biden comes in. As president he has immense power to steer federal policy.**

**And if you were to ask him how he’s doing, he’d probably say, I don’t know. “Taylor, We are doing a bang-up job on climate.”**

**Taylor Quimby: What are you a mobster? That is a terrible impression.**

**Nate Hegyi: But seriously, here’s Biden giving a speech to other world leaders a few weeks ago.**

*Joe Biden: United States is taking bold action towards taking our energy sector to net zero emissions by no later than 2050.*

*With measures like our Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we’re investing tens of billions of dollars in the scale up of new technologies like offshore wind, advanced nuclear and clean hydrogen.*

**Nate Hegyi: These two bills - the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law - are the biggest investment Congress has ever made to combat the climate crisis.**

**They’re pouring money into renewables. They’re providing tax credits for making and buying EVs. Investing billions into new charging stations across the country.**

**Taylor Quimby: So that sounds like a point his favor.**

**Nate Hegyi: And Biden also rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement. He also just announced proposed rules to limit emissions from car tailpipes and power plants. Created two new national monuments – this is all sounding very pro-environment, pro-climate, right?**

**Taylor Quimby: Yeah - and the world stage thing, the Paris Climate Agreement, that’s a big deal, getting the U.S. back at the table.**

**Nate Hegyi: But there is one very big thing Biden has not done. Something that academics, environmentalists, energy experts, they all say is essential to getting to his goal of net zero by 2050.**

**Taylor Quimby: Which is what?**

**Nate Hegyi: Cut down on fossil fuels.**

*Jean Su: What President Biden promised when he came into office was to actually stop new oil and gas leasing. Yet since he's come into office, we have seen the exact opposite, but to a degree that is unfathomable.*

**Nate Hegyi: So that’s Jean Su. She’s the energy justice director for the nonprofit Center For Biological Diversity. And she’s obviously not pleased with Joe.**

**Taylor Quimby: Very disappointed.**

**Nate Hegyi: That’s because the Biden administration is approving new drilling projects and pipelines left and right. More than Trump did during his first two years in office, Taylor. More than Trump!**

**Taylor Quimby: Wow.**

**Nate Hegyi: We are breaking records when it comes to fossil fuel production. More natural gas than ever before. More crude exports than ever before.**

**To give an example… This spring Biden approved the Willow Project.**

**It’s a controversial, massive drilling venture in the Alaskan arctic.**

*Jean Su: That one project is equivalent to the emissions of 70 coal fired power plants.*

**Nate Hegyi: Just after Willow, Biden approved a big** [**natural gas pipeline**](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/14/biden-alaska-lng-liquefied-natural-gas-exports) **from Alaska:**

*Jean Su: that is ten times the greenhouse gas emissions that the Willow project is.*

**Nate Hegyi: Even the Inflation Reduction Act, that huge piece of climate legislation,** [**came with some significant fossil fuel giveaways**](https://insideclimatenews.org/news/28072022/senate-democrats-produce-a-far-reaching-climate-bill-but-the-price-of-compromise-with-joe-manchin-is-years-more-drilling-for-oil-and-gas/)**.**

**It required continued oil and gas leasing on public lands and waters for the next decade. It paved the way for streamlined permitting for new pipelines.**

*Jean Su: Any five year old can tell you the reason we have a climate crisis is fossil fuels.*

**Nate Hegyi: The Biden administration isn’t hiding this. They’re *bragging* about it. Here’s Biden’s energy secretary during a press conference last summer:**

*Jennifer Granholm: Under this president, the country is producing more oil on average than it did during the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations.*

*Jean Su: One of the questions that one has to grapple with in terms of the Biden presidency is if you don't stop fossil fuels and you're actually pressing the gas, so to speak, on more fossil fuels, then what does it mean to be a climate president? And I think any kind of… from a climate science perspective, it actually is a pretty bad picture on balance.*

**Nate Hegyi: So Jean Su… not a fan.**

**Taylor Quimby: Which, I can really understand from her perspective because it’s always two sides to the climate coin, right, which is like, you’ve gotta transition into one thing but you’ve also got to distance yourself from the other. There’s always efforts on accountability for fossil fuel companies or getting rid of subsidies for fossil fuels. It sounds like Joe Biden is doing a really good job at one of those things, maybe, and not the other.**

**Nate Hegyi: Yes.  What if, though, Taylor, what if… this was all part of some grand plan? A masterful strategy to guide this very divisive, highly polarized democracy towards net zero by 2050.**

**Taylor Quimby: So Biden as… like the ultimate chessmaster?**

**Nate Hegyi: Yes. Biden’s Gambit. That’s coming up right after the break. But first, Oh my God, if there was ever an episode to write-in or call with your thoughts, this is it. Do you think Biden is a successful climate president? What is he doing wrong, what do you like, and are you gonna vote for him next year? Which oh no another election is coming.**

**Taylor Quimby: Four years has never felt so fast.**

**Nate Hegyi: Anyways, leave us a message at 1-844-Go-Otter or send us a voice memo to** **outsidein@nhpr.org****. We’ll be right back.**

**Nate Hegyi: I’m Nate Hegyi**

**Taylor Quimby: I’m Taylor Quimby**

**Nate Hegyi: Taylor. There’s this guy in my town… he’s nicknamed** [**Greg the Octopus**](https://twitter.com/gregtheoctopus?lang=en)**.**

**Nate Hegyi: He actually looks more like an owl with these big glasses and fluffy white sideburns.**

**Taylor Quimby: Okay.**

**Nate Hegyi: But Greg is known as the Octopus because he can play up to** [**75 games of chess**](https://missoulian.com/octopus-takes-on-76-chess-opponents/article_a7a11363-ea7d-59a6-9e83-9e10e7fcf390.html) **at once. And he’ll win a lot of them.**

*Greg Nowak: Rook to G-6. Wank!*

**Taylor Quimby: That is impressive. I can barely play one.**

**Nate Hegyi: He always tells people he took Bobby Fischer to a draw.**

**Taylor Quimby: I think that’s what all good people at chess say. I met Bobby Fischer on the street one day…**

**Nate Hegyi: I smoked him.**

**Nate Hegyi: Anyways, for this next bit, I want us to think of Biden as “Joe the Octopus.”**

**Playing dozens of  games of political chess with the one goal of getting the United States to become a carbon-neutral country.**

*Aseem Prakash: He's a smart politician and that's why he has been able to accomplish a lot, given the constraint which he's operating.*

**Nate Hegyi: That’s Aseem Prakash. He’s a political science professor at the University of Washington. Specializes in climate policy.**

**He’s a big proponent of the Joe the Octopus theory. That all these quote unquote fossil fuel giveaways are actually strategies to shore up political support from key moderates for his more ambitious climate goals.**

*Aseem Prakash: I think the president needs to maintain his political capital so that he can lean on the swing voters, the swing legislators to support his agenda.*

**Nate Hegyi: Take the Willow Project.**

**Taylor Quimby: This is the giant Alaskan oil venture that a lot of climate activists have really condemned.**

**Nate Hegyi: Yes. It was pushed hard by a moderate in Alaska – Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski. She’s a swing vote.**

**Taylor Quimby: Which is super important when Democrats have such razor thin margins in the senate, right?**

**Nate Hegyi: Absolutely. And Willow is one of Murkowski’s pet projects. She claims it’ll create thousands of new jobs and billions in new revenue for a state that relies on oil for its tax base.**

**Taylor Quimby: So Biden approves it.**

*Aseem Prakash: he thinks in his political calculations, keeping Alaska delegation in good humor is important.*

**Taylor Quimby: So Nate, I get the politics piece, but if the Willow Project is also going to pump a lot of carbon into the atmosphere. I dunno. It’s estimated to hold 600 million barrels of crude. I don’t see how you can argue that that will get us to net zero.**

**Nate Hegyi: Yes but you’re making an assumption -  *that* the Willow project actually happens. At least at the scale that its being planned.**

**Taylor Quimby: This is some chessmaster business. Please explain.**

**Nate Hegyi: So Conoco Phillips is the company behind Willow. And they say it won’t actually be operational until at least 2028 or 2029. And it could be a lot longer if lawsuits from environmental groups are successful. So Biden is potentially making a gamble.**

**That the country will have transitioned to way more renewables and electric cars before the Willow project really ramps up. So a lot of that oil will actually just stay in the ground because of market forces.**

**Taylor Quimby: He’s approving a thing that he thinks won’t happen.**

**Nate Hegyi: Right.  At least that’s what Aseem thinks.**

*Aseem Prakash: If, through electrification of the auto industry, you drastically reduce the demand for oil, then Willow project becomes what you call a ‘stranded asset.’ Its economic value is much less than what was anticipated in the future.*

**Taylor Quimby: A stranded asset. This feels like a CIA movie. Biden in his aviators. ‘We’re gonna make this a stranded asset.’ I can’t do Biden, I can’t do Biden!**

**Nate Hegyi: This gamble might actually work. Transportation accounts for about 60 percent of global oil demand. The world’s leading energy agency says more than half of all new vehicles sold in Europe, China and the U.S. will be electric by 2030. And that global oil production could begin declining as early as next year.**

**Taylor Quimby: But what about all the oil and gas production *right now*? Because you pointed out,, we’re hitting record levels. And Biden had a campaign promise that he broke to end all new oil and gas leasing on federal lands.**

**Nate Hegyi: So That could be another chess move from Joe the Octopus. The idea is that – if you want monumental change in a hyperpolarized country, one where you need every single vote, then you gotta give the people carrots… not sticks. Taylor, do you remember last year when gas prices were really high?**

**Taylor Quimby: Yeah. Anything north of $5 a gallon is pretty hard to miss.**

**Nate Hegyi: Yeah. And we should say that high prices weren’t the fault of Biden’s environmental policies.**

**Taylor Quimby: No. I’ve heard the presidency has very little they can do about gas prices. This was global forces and the war in Ukraine.**

**Nate Hegyi: Absolutely. But Republicans pounced anyway. Here’s Senator Ted Cruz at a press conference last summer.**

*Ted Cruz: This is deliberate. It’s not an accident. It’s the radical green new deal politics because Joe Biden believes if gas is $5 a gallon, $6 a gallon or $10 a gallon, that if he imposes enough pain, that eventually everyone will have this epiphany, and get rid of that truck and get rid of that minivan, and everyone will go buy an electric car.*

**Nate Hegyi: The move worked. People started confusing energy transition with inflation. Biden’s polling plummeted.**

**So Biden did what he could to at least LOOK like he was combatting high gas prices, even if that meant looking friendly to oil and gas.**

*Aseem Prakash: To kind of take away the points that his critics might score against him, that he's. He's anti oil. He's okay with inflation, blah, blah, blah.*

**Taylor Quimby: He doesn’t want conservatives scoring easy political points.**

**Nate Hegyi: And at the same time, he’s trying to woo conservatives and other skeptics into being part of the energy transition. Not by compelling them through executive action or something, but through incentives.**

**Taylor Quimby: Carrots, not sticks.**

*Aseem Prakash: If you see the numbers, much of the money for EVs and battery production is actually going to red states.*

**Nate Hegyi: So the Biden administration has awarded billions of dollars in electric vehicle and battery production grants to states that voted for Trump. Even automakers like Ford and Hyundai, they’re building EV and battery plants in Tennessee and Georgia.**

*Aseem Prakash: Republicans oppose climate policies when they are called climate policies. You put a different label of economic development… of energy security, you start getting a different response. And you see that in practice. Texas leads in both solar and wind. It's overtaken California in utility scale solar. So there is something to be said about that.*

**Taylor Quimby: That’s wow, that’s very tactical.**

**Nate Hegyi: Very Joe the Octopus. This woo them with carrots approach, it’s worked before in American history. Taylor, what car do you drive?**

**Taylor Quimby: I have a grey 2015 Honda Civic that is currently covered in pollen. So it’s kind of yellow.**

**Nate Hegyi: It is one of the most popular cars in the country.**

**Taylor Quimby: Really?**

**Nate Hegyi: But it wasn’t always that way.**

**Back in the early 1980’s there was a lot of “Buy American” mottos and anti-Japanese sentiment. Part of it was because of a trade war. The U.S. was importing a bunch of cars from Japan while our own auto plants were closing. People were losing jobs, they were getting riled up. All the stuff of a bruce springsteen song.**

*News report: As Japanese imports continue to take a big chunk of U.S. consumers the impact is felt in corporate bank accounts and on the unemployment line. Some 950 people are still laid off…*

**Nate Hegyi: There was a lot of political pressure on President Reagan. So he put a cap on how many cars the Japanese could sell in the U.S.**

**Taylor Quimby: I imagine they didn’t love that.**

**Nate Hegyi: No. But instead of going toe-to-toe against Reagan and the Republicans – the Japanese automakers agreed to the cap and then did something else.**

*Aseem Prakash: They moved a lot of their manufacturing to the United States, but to the southern states, which are nonunion, right to work. But it also created a constituency among Southern senators and legislators to support the auto industry. Japanese auto industry.*

**Nate Hegyi: The cap eventually ended in 1994. Now Japanese cars are some of the most popular vehicles in America – and a lot of them are assembled right here in the U.S. in red states.**

**Aseem thinks the same thing could happen with renewables and EVs.**

*Aseem Prakash: The bottom line is, as you start having more factories, you start having more battery factories. Et cetera. Et cetera. In southern states, the politics becomes very different. The legislator from Mississippi. From Georgia, from Tennessee, now have political incentives to say, you know, this is good.*

**Taylor Quimby: This makes sense to me. It’s like, you have some conservatives who’ve tried to slash the budget for FEMA - but, you know, when there’s a big disaster in a red state, conservative governors aren’t turning down federal assistance, right?**

**I feel like, what you’re saying is that Biden fundamentally wants to change the economics. make it worth your while to invest in the renewable economy, you still might have conservatives who argue against climate action in their rhetoric, but are actually super invested in growing their green economies.**

**Nate Hegyi: Show me the money.**

**Taylor Quimby: Show me the money!**

**Nate Hegyi:Aseem says in a democratic country, where change is slow and your hold on power is shaky, this tactic is the best way get to net zero. Stimulate the market in your favor. Don’t risk your neck with high energy prices. Turn your enemies into friends.**

*Aseem Prakash: What is important is that a smart leader Understands the sense of our times, what are the political opportunities and what are the constraints? And given those constraints, the political leader can kind of navigate shepherd shape the policy making process. So I think. Biden has played an important role. The environmental groups didn't get everything, but they got a lot. Is the highest ever federal spending on environmental programs. So. Given the track record of previous presidents and the political constraints they face. I think Biden understood the need of the time and, you know, pushing the agenda while realizing that Perfection is the enemy of the Practical. So being being practical and pragmatic and seeing what can can be accomplished.*

**Taylor Quimby: Practical and pragmatic. Joe the pragmatic octopus. But will that approach get the U.S. to net zero by 2050? I mean you could argue that he’s done more than any previous president and I think that is undeniable from a certain perspective, like dollars invested, but will it do the climate job? That is the question. That is his stated goal.**

**Nate Hegyi: Yeah. The world’s leading energy agency says… probably not.**

**In a recent report it said sure, we might hit EV targets, but global leaders also need to place moratoriums on new oil, gas and coal developments right now.**

**This is why Joe the Octopus really bothers activists like Jean Su. She says a climate emergency of this scale demands more.**

*Jean Su: There is no way within the time span that we need to change our entire energy system that you can do that with pure carrots and no sticks. A strong government – and a responsible government – is one that has sticks AND carrots, but sticks. Sticks for an industry that it has allowed so many millions of carrots for, for the past two hundred years of our industrial development.*

**Taylor Quimby: So instead of Joe the Octopus, she’s looking for… Joe the Bull.**

**Nate Hegyi: This is actually where the bighorn sheep comes in. I like the image of Joe the bighorn sheep. Smashing climate action through with his curly horns.**

**Taylor Quimby: For the images for this episode we should consider AI for creating some Biden bighorn sheep.**

**Nate Hegyi: I think this is where AI begins to creep into our workplace, Taylor.**

**Taylor Quimby: Yup, this is it. This is the beginning.**

**Nate Hegyi: Jean says that using executive actions and essentially being a bighorn sheep can work in this country. All you have to do is look at Republicans.**

*Jean Su: The Republicans actually have no problem thinking that way. And in fact, they've gotten a lot of things done, like executive order, got the border wall built, which which I personally litigated, used emergency powers to get funding to do that. And they make a lot of people happy in this country. I think if you end up coming into power and say, I need to get in power again, so I'm going to make choices that are less that are not what needed, but that will just let me still be in power, then what is the point of being in power if you actually have it and you have it for a finite period of time? And we are facing the climate emergency, which we are, then I think it's incumbent on you as a world leader to do everything you can to race against the scientific clock that we have.*

**Nate Hegyi: So Taylor what do you think - Joe the Bighorn Sheep or Joe the Octopus?**

**Taylor Quimby: Well, she’s pointing to the border wall, for example, and all the things President Trump was able to do through executive action. But you know, President Trump was a one term president. Maybe Joe is trying to be a quote unquote consensus builder so he can get re-elected - and then all of a sudden we’ll see him pulling all of these levers that she wants to see him pull, lots of executive actions. Especially because there’s the chance that democrats lose the Senate in 2024. That might be all he can do at that point. So I’m wondering if he’s Joe the Octopus right now, but should he be reelected, all the sudden you’re gonna see the Bighorn sheep Joe come out.**

**Nate Hegyi: it’s like one of those hologram cards where you turn it one way and it’s joe the octopus, and you turn it the other way and it’s joe the bighorn sheep.**

**Taylor Quimby: That could be our… no..**

**Nate Hegyi: You can buy that at our shop today, go to outsideinradio dot…**

**Taylor Quimby: Well what do you think? What’s your take?**

**Nate Hegyi: I think you’re right. But from a sheer climate perspective, if you want to hit net zero by 2050, you need Bighorn Joe. But there’s also a chance Bighorn Joe would lose to Trump or DeSantis, and then you’d see another four year lull with no climate action. So it feels a little “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” scenario.**

**Taylor Quimby: So ultimately, what you really need to move the world quickly, or to move the U.S. quickly on climate action, is a bighorn octopus. But that is a very hard animal to come by in politics.**

**Nate Hegyi: This was reported and produced by me Nate Hegyi.**

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