

Bill Kaplan: Enough, this is not America

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Last week Trump had lunch with GOP senators to demonstrate unity on cutting taxes. Trump tweeted: “The biggest TAX CUT in the history of our country.” No mention of tax reform. Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan is distraught. Why? “Tax reform, in Ryan’s ideal was supposed to be bigger than tax cuts. It was supposed to be revenue-neutral: lowering some taxes, raising others, closing loopholes and simplifying the (tax) code. It wasn’t supposed to be so easy to criticize for lowering taxes on corporations and higher-income Americans” (Washington Post).

Moreover, “Trump’s day of unity turn(ed) into GOP crackup” (Politico). Shortly before the lunch Tennessee GOP Senator Bob Corker and Trump had more twitter exchanges. Corker said: Trump is guilty of the “debasing of our nation, the constant non-truth telling” (Washington Post). Corker emphasized that he would not support Trump for reelection in 2020. It got worse.

After the lunch Arizona GOP Senator Jeff Flake denounced Trump. Flake said: “We must never regard as normal the regular and casual undermining of our democratic norms and ideals. We must never meekly accept the daily sundering of our country: the personal attacks, the threats against principles, freedoms and institutions, the flagrant disregard for truth or decency, the reckless provocations” Trump, in an alternative universe, tweeted: “So nice being with Republican senators today. Multiple standing ovations”.

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The next day in a Washington Post op-ed Flake compared Trump to a disgraced demagogue — Wisconsin GOP Senator Joe McCarthy: “Nine months of this administration is enough for us to stop pretending that this is somehow normal. ... Enough. The outcome of this is in our hands.” However, Trump, Speaker Ryan and Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell want to deflect what Corker and Flake said in order to pass tax cuts for the wealthy. “80 percent of the plan’s net tax cuts would go to the top 1 percent. ...” (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities / Tax Policy Center).

All Wisconsin GOP members of Congress voted for an outline of the tax cuts, designed to circumvent informed open debate, with later final speedy passage. All Wisconsin Democratic members of Congress voted no. Why the bum’s rush? The GOP tax cuts are not paid for and will add at least \$1.5 trillion to the national debt. Worse, all the GOP proposed individual tax cuts (mostly for the wealthy) and corporations add up to about \$5.5 trillion (Tax Policy Center). The tax cuts will make America a plutocracy.

On the auction block – repeal of the federal estate tax. But just 5,400 estates nationally (70 in Wisconsin), including in total just 50 small businesses and family farms, will owe any estate tax in 2018 (Joint Committee on Taxation). And, eliminating the state and local tax deduction will fall on the middle class in Wisconsin. For example, 33 percent of tax filers in Ryan’s congressional district use this deduction (New York Times).

This is not tax reform. Conservatives like Corker and Flake should vote no. Enough, this is not America.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 – 2009.