

Bill Kaplan: Kansas and Wisconsin

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Since 2011 Kansas and Wisconsin have been far-right GOP models for sharp budget and tax cutting that would supposedly lead to economic growth and prosperity. However, it was all delusion. In Kansas “the model imploded It will take years for Kansas to recover ...” (New York Times). And, Wisconsin is having its own day of reckoning. In 2015 former Wisconsin GOP state Senator Dale Schultz presciently said: “The hangover from the Walker era will be spectacular”. Some specifics.

Last year Kansas voters finally had enough. Far-right GOP legislators were ousted and replaced by moderate Republicans and Democrats. It was a seismic shift in governing priorities. First to go was the tax “experiment” in cutting that led to deficits, draconian budget cuts and no economic miracle. The more moderate GOP-led legislature faced reality and voted to increase taxes to pay for schools and roads. Kansas GOP Governor Sam Brownback vetoed the bill. But that was not the end.

On June 6 the Kansas GOP-led legislature successfully overrode Brownback’s continued resistance to reality. “The tax reductions in Kansas had not delivered the economic growth that Brownback promised but caused massive holes in the state’s budget and led to unpopular spending cuts in areas such as education” (Washington Post). Wisconsin GOP state legislators should heed the shift in Kansas.

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Wisconsin GOP Governor Scott Walker has taken Wisconsin down the same road as Brownback. Billions in tax cuts, tilted to the wealthy. “Three of Wisconsin’s billionaires sometimes pay zero state income tax” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel). Public schools took a big hit, a nearly \$800 million cut. Similarly, the UW System

staggered from \$500 million in cuts. And, Wisconsin roads, once the envy of the nation, fell into disrepair. All the while the Wisconsin economy struggles and continues to lose well-paying manufacturing jobs. Wisconsinites must vote for change in 2018.

In March, as House Speaker Ryan and Trump stumbled in repealing the Affordable Care Act, Kansas stepped up. The GOP-led state legislature voted for Medicaid expansion: Cover at least 150,000, return Kansas federal taxes to the state, boost jobs and economic growth. Brownback, with his head in the sand, vetoed the expansion of Medicaid. Just like Walker.

Governor Walker opposes federally funded Medicaid expansion, losing nearly \$1 billion in net savings through 2020-21. Worse – 80,000 low-income (many working) Wisconsinites could have been covered. Moreover, saved state funds could be used to fund education and roads. It gets worse.

Last week Brownback begrudgingly accepted the wisdom of the GOP-led legislature in keeping concealed guns out of public hospitals and mental health centers. But some Wisconsin GOP legislators want Wisconsinites to be able to carry concealed guns onto school grounds and mental health facilities with no permit or safety training. Walker, pay attention to Kansas. No mixed signals.

Finally, Kansas gets 31 percent of its power from wind. Wisconsin's power comes mostly from coal, only 8.3 percent from wind and other renewable sources. Time to remove our blinders and look at Kansas. Wisconsin voters must demand change in 2018.

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