

Bill Kaplan: Tax cuts will tie our hands

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Trump, House Speaker Paul Ryan and Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson live in the 1920s. Tax cuts aplenty, big budget cuts and a minimal role for the federal government. Trump is out of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby", a corrupt empty-headed narcissistic tycoon. Ryan acts like 1920s Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, obsessed with cutting taxes for the rich. And, Johnson is straight from Sinclair Lewis's "Babbitt", a businessman uncaring about regular folks.

Back to the present. The budget remains a question mark. On Thursday, Congress kicked the can down the road, passing just a two week spending deal to avert a shutdown. All Wisconsin GOP members of Congress and Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin voted yes. Democratic Representatives Ron Kind and Gwen Moore were opposed (Democrat Mark Pocan, recovering from surgery, didn't vote). Trump said if a shutdown happens he would "blame the Democrats". However, the GOP is in charge everywhere. This is not governing.

And, neither are the tax cuts speeding through the GOP-led Congress. In September, Trump lied: "(T)ax reform will protect low-income and middle-income households, not the wealthy and well-connected". Ryan and Johnson peddled similar nonsense. On Sunday, the Washington Post reported: "As top lawmakers from the House and Senate now rush to complete negotiations to push the tax plan into law, it amounts to a massive corporate tax cut, with uneven - and temporary - benefits to the middle class that could end up increasing taxes for many working families in future years." The rich, including Trump, make out like bandits.

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Moreover, the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) said the Senate tax cuts would add \$1 trillion to the debt. Johnson attacked the JCT. However, the New York Times exposed Johnson's premise: "Public statements and messaging documents obtained by the New York Times show a concerted push by Republican lawmakers to discredit a nonpartisan agency (JCT) they had long praised". Trump, Ryan and Johnson will use the debt created by the tax cuts to demand cuts in Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid and other domestic spending. Ryan is already reaching for our wallets: "We're going to have to get back next year at entitlement reform (cuts), which is how you tackle the debt and deficit." Chutzpah!

Make no mistake, Trump and the GOP-led Congress are pushing budget and tax cuts that will tie our hands. Costs for hurricanes, massive fires and other natural disasters are well over \$100 billion, with much more to come (NYT). Climate change is real and the bills will be eye-popping. And, Trump can't tweet away the boom and bust cycles of capitalism. But doing away with the economic tools to mitigate a recession means a 1930s-style Great Depression in the future.

Finally, the tax cuts will put a stake in the heart of any possible infrastructure program to rebuild roads, bridges, mass transit, water and sewer works. It's all a scam. Take from regular folks and give to the rich. And, our hands will be tied to solve future problems.

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