Opinion

News



Republican Gov. Sam Brownback is pictured in late February. A Catholic, he was nominated by President Donald Trump to be an ambassador for religious freedom. (CNS/Reuters/Joshua Roberts)



by Allison Walter

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @allisonwalter91

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 7, 2017
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Trump phenomenon started in 2015, but today's Trump-backed tax plan that is making its way through Congress has a much older origin. I was reminded of this fact as I flew from Kansas back to Washington, D.C., after Thanksgiving on the same plane as Gov. Sam Brownback. Faced with the prospect that we might imminently see on the national scale the fiscal devastation we saw in Kansas, it seems useful to recap a couple lessons learned from the colossal Kansas tax disaster that began five years ago:

Trickle-down economics doesn't work, and defy Catholic social teaching

Brownback and the Kansas Republican-majority legislature decided to put into practice the perfidious trickle-down economic theory that suggests if we cut taxes for the wealthy (i.e. businesses and corporations) somehow we'll all come out better off. Theoretically, those who receive a tax cut will reinvest that money in the economy, and it will trickle down to those lower on the economic ladder.

Kansas waited five years for this magic to materialize, and all we saw was a budget shortfall of $700 million and public schools being forced to close early.

In discussing the false promise of trickle-down economics, Pope Francis didn't mince words: "In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting."

Misguided tax reform harms the most vulnerable first, spurning the Gospel message

Francis was right. When it comes to these trickle-down tax plans, the excluded are still waiting. The massive budget cuts we saw in Kansas were passed at the peril of social programs that many working families rely upon.

When taxes were cut and the economic boon didn't immediately follow, Kansas legislators said "just wait."

Advertisement

When you rely on food stamps to buy weekly groceries, or get your prescriptions through Medicaid, you can't wait for the prosperity to trickle down: You need help now. As Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium*, realities are greater than ideas. We have a responsibility to one another, to meet the need that we see, and that doesn't include telling a single mom with two hungry children to wait for the wealth to trickle down from the already-rich. She can't wait for the trickle, even if it were to come.

Too long after it became apparent that the tax experiment had been a massive failure, the legislature voted to restore some of the taxes that had been gutted. The governor vetoed, and his own Republican legislature overrode that veto. Politically, that's a big deal, even a disaster some might say.

When I moved to D.C. as a 22-year-old, the first thing I heard about Kansas in the big city was a mockery of my state's mistakes on taxes. The criticisms of Kansas' tax plan stuck with me as I watched the effects play out from our nation's capital. As I sat on the plane last month with Brownback several rows behind me while I wrote a press release for a protest against Trump's tax plan, it all seemed to come full circle.

As a person of faith, I look back on the ways Kansas failed to look out for the vulnerable in our community, and I cannot stand silent while Congress creates this disaster on a national scale.

[Allison Walter is a high school theology teacher and track coach. She was formerly press secretary with Faith in Public Life and policy education associate with NETWORK Lobby in Washington, D.C. A graduate of Saint Louis University and a native of Kansas City, Walter believes in the power of faith to transform society.]

Editor's note: We can send you an email alert every time a Young Voices column is posted to NCRonline.org. Go to this page and follow directions: Email alert sign-up.