Opinion
Editorial



by NCR Editorial Staff

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December 8, 2017
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"The more you read, the more you go, 'Holy crap, what's this?' " That was what Greg Jenner, a former top tax official in George W. Bush's Treasury Department, told Politico when asked for a comment on the tax reform plan Republicans are working

to shove through Congress. There are so many things wrong with this tax plan: It was put together in secrecy and then rushed through Congress; it is sloppy; it favors the wealthy, ignores the poor and hurts the middle class, to name a few criticisms.

What is truly wrong with this plan, however, is that is just the first step of a two-step process that will accelerate the decadeslong conservative agenda to shrink government and reduce social investments that aid all Americans.

Numerous analyses have shown the Republican messaging on this tax plan to be a lie. The plan does not favor the middle class. We have yet to see a final reconciliation bill, but what we have seen in the Senate and House versions are tax cuts that flow overwhelmingly to the richest households and to profitable corporations. The Senate bill would leave 13 million Americans without health insurance and severely undermine confidence in the health care market.

Numerous studies, even those done by government offices, say these plans will add a trillion dollars and probably more to the deficit. These studies, too, refute Republican claims that giving more money to the wealthy and large corporations will stimulate economic growth and generate enough revenues to offset the cuts.

Before the Senate vote, a coalition of interfaith leaders marched on Capitol Hill in opposition to the GOP tax plans. They marched under a banner emblazoned with a quote from Isaiah: "Woe to you legislators of unjust laws … who rob the poor of justice."

Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pennsylvania, addressed the rally and quoted St. Augustine: "Without justice, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers?" We would endorse that sentiment.

These plans have been put together in backrooms and corridors, with little to no public scrutiny, which calls into question the integrity of the Republican leadership. The speed at which it is being enacted also must be challenged. Democrats were handed a 479-page tax bill filled with x-outs and handwritten margin notes just hours before a vote.

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Politico's analysis of the plan concluded that it is "riddled with bugs, loopholes and other potential problems that could plague lawmakers long after their legislation is signed into law." The rush continues to get this legislation through the reconciliation process, so there is no hope that fixes can be made now.

The Republicans know that if they do this fast and as holidays approach, not many voters will be paying attention.

All of this is, of course, part of the Republican leadership's plan, and passage of the tax reform is just Part 1 of their two-part agenda. Part 2 will unfold next year and the years after, when these leaders begin to decry the ballooning deficits (though they won't say these tax cuts fed the deficits), and they will call for cuts to programs that support low- and middle-income Americans.

"Republican leaders have repeatedly said in recent weeks that after enacting a tax bill, they will turn to budget cuts — particularly 'welfare reform,' long a code for cuts to programs that help families of limited means afford food, housing, health care, and other basic needs," says the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

In October, Congress approved a budget resolution that called for $5.8 trillion in budget cuts over the coming decade. Deep cuts can be expected to Medicaid, Medicare, and basic assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (formerly known as food stamps). Republicans have spent years whittling away at these programs. But the October resolution also called for cutting funds from education and training programs, transportation and other infrastructure, medical research, child and elder care, and other priorities that benefit nearly all Americans.

We believe that these programs and benefits should be viewed as investments in future generations and a livable society. We oppose cuts to these programs and believe that our taxes should support and expand programs like these that benefit all citizens.

The tax plan promoted by the leaders who now control Congress undermines the country's ability to support these social investments. The plan will make it easier to cut these investments in subsequent budget years. That is why we must fight against the tax plan and the coming budget cuts.

A version of this story appeared in the **Dec. 15-28, 2017** print issue.