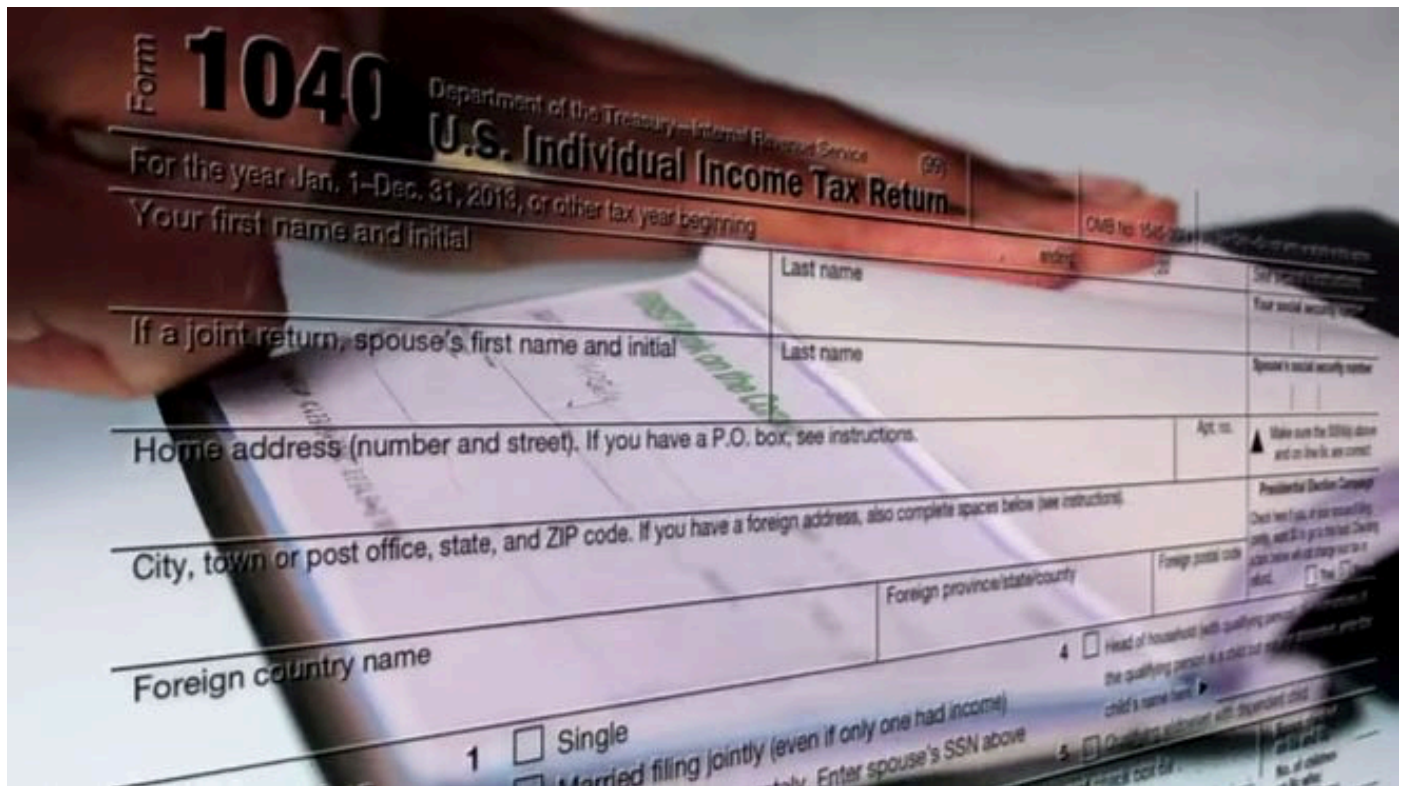


First the pandemic, now a flat tax. Haven't Arizona's most vulnerable suffered enough?

Opinion: Arizona should invest in long-starved public programs such as education, safety nets and infrastructure - not give tax cuts to the state's wealthiest.



As we muster our energy and resolve for the task of recovery from the past year, we hear the profoundly disturbing news that Gov. Doug Ducey and legislative leadership have come to an agreement to [adopt a 2.5% flat tax on income](#) and are maneuvering for votes.

Their justification for this action is a budget forecast showing the state ending fiscal 2021 with a \$2.6 billion surplus.

This move is shocking and shameful. It further harms regular Arizonans, especially essential workers who have been taking the brunt of the virus while the rest of us could harbor safely. Such a shortsighted and unprecedented tax policy change will cripple Arizona's economy for generations to come.

This has been a disastrous year for many

The proposed change comes at a perilous time for Arizonans, many of whom endured more than a year of hardship and are finally beginning to repair, renew and create new possibilities.

We work with thousands of congregants and know their story and struggle. We know firsthand their hurt, anxiety, depression and grief. Families have been torn asunder by the loss of loved ones and the lingering effects of illness.

More: [Arizona faith leaders say they will call a referendum if flat tax passes](#)

Essential workers are exhausted from their heroic efforts to keep our collective life going. Many are facing the reality that their jobs are gone forever or that crushing debt will force them from their homes.

Our young people have suffered serious, potentially life-altering, educational setbacks. People are desperate and traumatized, precipitating mental crises that require urgent attention.

The most vulnerable suffered the most.

Lowering taxes will handcuff future generations

Lowering income tax brackets across the board will handcuff future generations of Arizonans as they attempt to deal with inevitable future recessions, or as they try to invest in long-starved public programs such as education, safety nets and

infrastructure.

In addition, a reduction in the state's income tax collections would directly and [permanently reduce state revenue-sharing](#) with cities and towns.

Because 70% of municipal budgets are devoted to fire and police services, [cuts in municipal budgets](#) would most likely result in cuts to these vital services. These local public services touch our lives in an immediate way: slower emergency response times cost lives.

We urge the governor and Legislative leadership to regard the budget surplus as a blessing, an abundance that should be particularly applied for the good of Arizonans who have suffered the most during this pandemic. They should rather consider a one-time enhancement to the earned income tax credit or child tax credits for families.

Lawmakers should abandon this dangerous plan

It is stunning that those who have been entrusted with the leadership of the state would craft a massive tax cut for the wealthiest Arizonans and effectively undo the will of the voters to raise the state's investment in public education. This is an indefensible disregard for the needs of the battered and bruised people of this state who are victims of this calamity.

Moreover, a permanent tax cut based on a clearly temporary budget surplus is highly irresponsible.

We keenly remember the pain of the draconian budget cuts we suffered in the Great Recession. Those budget cuts were the result of more than 30 years of tax cuts that straitjacketed the Legislature's response with a structural deficit.

A flat tax would severely impair Arizona's already fragile and brittle ability to

protect vulnerable people in the economic downturns and other catastrophes that we will inevitably face in the future.

State leaders should abandon their fixation with a flat tax. It is a dangerous plan.

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