

# The High Price of Lower Taxes

Published: Wednesday, 24 February 2021 23:43

Written by: Matthew Weinstein

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Legislative leaders have said that 2021 should be “the year of the tax cut.” Numerous public opinion surveys show that Utahns disagree. This may come as a surprise to policymakers, who have been in the habit of handing out tax break after tax break for decades.

But there seems to be an increasing public awareness that Utah is now paying a price for decades of tax cutting that have left us with the lowest overall tax level in 50 years relative to Utah personal income.

## UTAH'S URGENT UNMET NEEDS

We all like being able to pay less in taxes. But there is a growing understanding that tax cuts are leaving us unable to address the long list of urgent unmet needs in education, infrastructure, social services, air quality, public health, and many other areas that affect our standard of living and quality of life. All of these issues will shape the Utah that our children will one day inherit.

Outlined below are some examples of the urgent unmet needs in Utah.

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## Early Care and Education

	Amount	
\$500-600 Million/Year		Envision Utah <a href="#">estimated</a> that it would cost the state \$500-600 million each year just to get the state to be among the worst in the nation.
		Our leaders' unwillingness to pay for this problem is why our state's problem is why our state's average (after adjusting for cost of living) of adults (age 25+) with a high school or less educational attainment is 15% higher than the national average. Voices for Utah Children's Fund is calling for full-day Kindergarten for all children, regardless of whether they opt in to it.
\$52.5 Million/Year		Well over \$1 billion is needed to fund a system of early child care that would allow all children to opt in to it.
\$1 Billion		

## Health

	Amount	
\$59 Million/Year		It would cost Utah \$59 million each year to cover the health care costs of uninsured children and adults.
		The longstanding problem of high rates of uninsured children and adults rank last in the nation. The problem is not just the high rates of uninsured children and adults, but also the high rates of uninsured children and adults who are Hispanic/Latinx and why the state is not doing more to cover them.

## Human Services

	Area	
	Mental Health & Substance Abuse Treatment	Utah ranks last in the nation in terms of mental health and substance abuse treatment according to a <a href="#">2019 report</a> .

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## Disability Services

A [2020 report](#) from the Utah Department of Justice Reinvestment Center found that recidivism -- and a lack of availability and the cost of treatment are still high. The DSPD disability services from 1,953 people

## Domestic Violence

The FY20 \$1 million in domestic violence services to 143 people. The Utah Domestic Violence Center identified insufficient legal representation and legal services as major barriers to violence. The official poverty line is because it does not cover expenses.

## Seniors

A [2018 study found](#) that pocket medical expenses, Social Security income, and their income, and about 100 couples and about 100

## Infrastructure, Environment, and Housing

### Area

## Infrastructure

The American Society of Civil Engineers infrastructure in its

## Air Quality

The Utah Transportation Department [nearly \\$8 billion](#) on The Wasatch Front ozone and 7th w

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## Housing

Affordable housing  
the 64,797 house  
income renter hou  
housing, which is

The FY21 afforda  
Sen. Anderegg, w  
was reduced to ju

## WHY TAX CUTS ARE A BIG DEAL

Some legislators have said to us, "What's the big deal with \$100 million of tax cuts out of a \$22 billion budget?".

The big deal is that we've been cutting, on average, about \$100 million every single year for the last 25 years.

Voices for Utah Children's research has found that tax cuts from the last 25 years has left us short \$2.4 billion each year, amounting to an 18% cut to public revenues.

One could even call us a "slow-motion Kansas" because in 2012 they cut taxes overnight by 15%, leading to an economic slump and political backlash that saw the Republican legislature reverse the cuts in 2017 and the public elect a Democratic governor in 2018.

But here in Utah, we're like the proverbial frog in the pot of water heating on the stove. The devastating impacts of these revenue reductions have been slow and incremental, so we've come to accept as normal a state of affairs that Kansans quickly reversed.

Instead of figuring out the fairest way to restore some of those lost revenues so we can address our most urgent challenges, Utah's political leadership

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continues to pass new tax cuts every year, generally skewed toward the top of the income scale.

For example, Voices for Utah Children [analyzed two of the tax cuts proposed this year](#) and found that they excluded lower-income Utahns completely and mostly went to the highest-income households – even though their supporters said publicly that they are intended to help low- and middle-income Utahns.

Public opinion surveys conducted last year by the [Deseret News and Hinckley Institute](#), by the [Utah Foundation](#), and by [Envision Utah](#) all found a strong popular preference for public investment over tax cuts.

Same thing with surveys this month by the [Deseret News-Hinckley Institute](#) and by [Voices for Utah Children](#).

Breaking old habits can be hard. As is often the case, the public appears to be ahead of our political leaders. But let's hope that they too will eventually come to appreciate the wisdom of their constituents, who are increasingly aware of the high price Utah is paying for lower taxes.

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Utah has been fortunate in weathering the current recession. This gives us a unique opportunity to be able to make smart long-term investments at a time when other states are cutting budgets. As a State we need to take advantage of this situation and invest in Utah kids, not tax cuts.

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