

Governor Sam Brownback
2017 State of the State Address
January 10th, 2017

Mr. Speaker, Madam President, members of the Kansas Supreme Court, members of the Cabinet, and my personal favorite, the First Lady of Kansas Mary Brownback.¹

Also here are my parents, Bob and Nancy Brownback.

My fellow Kansans, welcome.

Welcome to the State of the State address.

A chance to see old friends, to make new ones. A chance to celebrate the awesomeness of Kansas.

This event was once described to me as the beautiful ritual...conducted...just before the real battle begins. [LAUGHTER].

So thanks for being here and thank you for your service. American self-government depends on citizens like you giving of your time and talents.

The American way also depends on the defense of freedom provided by the sacrifice from our men and women in uniform. Always recognizing "Duty First," America's First Infantry Division is celebrating this year their 100th anniversary.²

Playing a key role in every major conflict since its founding, today nearly 5,000 Big Red One soldiers are spread across Iraq, Afghanistan, and Korea.³ Joining us tonight are senior leaders from Fort Riley, Brigadier General Pat Frank and Command Sergeant Major Jonathan Stephens. [STANDING APPLAUSE].

Also joining us this evening is a family of volunteer firefighters that fought the largest Prairie fire in modern history.⁴ David and Patty Johnson, along with their daughter Lori, stepped into danger to protect their local communities in Barbour and Comanche Counties. Please help me in recognizing these heroes. [STANDING APPLAUSE].

Over a third of the members in this chamber tonight are new to the Legislature.⁵

This Legislature will not only welcome many new faces but also some familiar faces in new positions. Welcome to Ron Ryckman Jr, our new Speaker. [APPLAUSE]. [turning around].

And Susan Wagle, our returning Senate President. [APPLAUSE].

To Minority leaders Hensley and Ward, welcome. [APPLAUSE].

Like the caucuses they serve, these are very different people, but they have something in common. They all chose to be here and serve.

As you meet your new colleagues, you'll be trying to determine what sort of people they are. Well, they are just like you. They love Kansas and sacrificed to be here. Cherish that connection. Value people over politics.

By many measures Kansas is the envy of the world.

Set in the most productive part of this blessed nation, Kansans enjoy unparalleled sunsets and a quality of life unimaginable to most humans throughout history.

Our people, numbering now almost three million,⁶ lead the planet in agriculture,⁷ telecommunications,⁸ engineering,⁹ aerospace,¹⁰ precision manufacturing,¹¹ animal health,¹² food safety,¹³ and composite material innovation.¹⁴

Kansans are among the most hard-working,¹⁵ well-educated,¹⁶ and charitable¹⁷ people on earth. [APPLAUSE].

That's why, even though Kansans value life and liberty under law, government has never been the source of our strength—our families, businesses, faith communities, and homes—these are the strength of Kansas. [APPLAUSE].

Our state has record population,¹⁸ record new businesses,¹⁹ record grain production,²⁰ and record income.²¹

My fellow Kansans, it is for these reasons and more that I can report to you the state of our state is indeed strong. [STANDING APPLAUSE].

Like our ancestors before us, we draw on this strength—in times of plenty, and in times of hardship.

With struggles in key sectors of our state's economy, most notably agriculture and oil & gas,²²²³²⁴ our state government is confronting challenges.²⁵

Most immediately, we must address the imbalance between state revenues and expenditures.

As a first step, I encourage the Legislature to put a bill adjusting the 2017 budget on my desk by the end of the month.

Working with the relevant chairs and the leadership, we have many suggestions as to what that measure should look like.

But as the legislature is the spending branch,²⁶²⁷ that work appropriately begins here. Our commitment to you is to support that process and, anticipating a workable product, to sign it.

But the scale of the challenge is such that even this bill will only amount to a first step.

That is why, tomorrow, Budget Director Sullivan will present in detail...a structurally balanced budget. [APPLAUSE].

This budget is balanced.

Balanced in that it reconciles spending with available revenue.

Balanced in that it adequately supports the core functions of state government, while finding necessary efficiencies.

Balanced in that it addresses both sides of the ledger, revenue and expenditure.

The days of tax first, cut never have come to an end.

As President Bill Clinton even observed, “The era of big government is over.”²⁸
[APPLAUSE].

Can we really ask Kansans to pay more for a government that maintains separate bureaucracies to license the practice of barbering AND cosmetology? Our budget will fix that.

Do we continue to need separate departments to regulate the state insurance and securities markets? Our budget will address that too.

Many times this administration has proposed similar efficiencies, and inevitably there were those who insisted that we couldn’t possibly get along without both a Department of Transportation and Turnpike Authority;²⁹ without both a

Commerce Department AND a Technology Enterprise Corporation;³⁰ without both a Department of Corrections AND a separate Juvenile Justice Authority.³¹ But just about every time, shortly after consolidations were complete, most people were left asking, 'Why didn't we do this before?'

And we owe it to Kansas taxpayers to find those efficiencies again, BEFORE asking for more revenue. [APPLAUSE]. That's why my budget adopts recommendations from the efficiency study commissioned by the legislature.³²

Having said that, we will propose modest, targeted revenue measures to fund essential state services.

In any proposal as vast as a state budget, people will find provisions to dislike. That's a necessary start of any conversation, but good negotiations require give and take. Kansans deserve no less. [APPLAUSE].

As a state, we have pioneered new ground on small business policy. Kansas was the first state in the nation to pass such a small-business tax policy focused on lifting the income tax burden from job creators.³³

With two-thirds of Kansans working for small businesses,³⁴ this policy is targeted support that Kansans have used to increase pay for their employees, hold prices down for their products, or expand their businesses.

Gilmore Tagge is one such Kansas business. Located in Clay Center, they were recently named Kansas Exporter of the Year.³⁵ They used the tax benefit to increase the salary of their employees.³⁶ [APPLAUSE].

As new businesses decline nationally,³⁷ we boast a record number of new businesses here.³⁸ Businesses from Missouri are moving across the border, making Kansas City more of a Kansas city.³⁹

President-elect Trump's tax plan targets small businesses.⁴⁰ Speaker Ryan's tax plan targets small businesses in much the same way as we did.⁴¹

Other states, most notably Missouri,⁴² are looking at how to create an economic atmosphere for private sector job growth. The biggest creators of jobs in Kansas and America are small businesses.⁴³ Hurting them puts us at a competitive disadvantage.

The purpose of our small business tax cut has been to increase the number of small businesses and increase private sector job growth.⁴⁴ That policy has worked. [APPLAUSE].

Fortunately for our budget, Kansas had the foresight to reform Medicaid—a policy others are following. Instead of an open-ended fee for service entitlement, Kansas became the first state in America to serve its entire Medicaid population through managed care.⁴⁵

Thanks to the Leadership of Lt. Governor Jeff Colyer, we have seen more Kansans served than ever before,⁴⁶ steady or improving health outcomes for beneficiaries,⁴⁷ and dramatic cost savings to taxpayers of \$1.4 billion.⁴⁸

[APPLAUSE].

As challenging as our current budget situation is, imagine if we had followed the siren song of the Affordable Care Act.

Amid much discussion and dissent, our Administration determined that early adoption of ObamaCare was not in the best interests of Kansas, and returned a \$31.5 million grant designed to establish a Kansas exchange.⁴⁹ Six years later, the wisdom of that decision is obvious.

Of the 23 state exchanges established under ObamaCare, a majority have failed, at a cost of billions including significant hits to state budgets.⁵⁰ As major insurers abandon the few remaining state exchanges,⁵¹ the decision to refuse early adoption looks increasingly like declining a discount ticket on the Titanic.

The same holds true for the policy choice not to take the bait on Medicaid expansion.

You've heard the promise—hundreds of thousands more beneficiaries at zero cost to the state—all paid for with 'free' federal money.

The new Congress and Administration in Washington are setting to work repealing and replacing ObamaCare, dramatically re-writing the Medicaid program.⁵² Promises of limitless ‘free’ money from Washington to cover expanded populations were never going to be kept, but that reality might now arrive sooner than later. For states who took the expansion path, the reckoning could be severe.

Given these facts, it would be foolish to endorse the ObamaCare expansion of Medicaid now—akin to airlifting on to the Titanic. Kansas was right. Kansas should stay the course. [APPLAUSE].

We will continue to be at the vanguard in reform and improvement of our social services delivery.

To that end, Kansas will launching KanCare 2.0 in the coming year.⁵³

This Administration has focused efforts on solving long term issues facing our state like the need for more jobs—we’ve added 64,000 private sector jobs.⁵⁴

The need to preserve water resources—we’ve seen the life of the Ogallala Aquifer extended in some areas through conservation and new technology.⁵⁵

The need to expand wind energy production—we’ve seen \$10 billion of wind investments brought to the prairie.⁵⁶

The need to help the poor amongst us—we've tripled the number of able-bodied adults leaving poverty.⁵⁷ [APPLAUSE].

The need to save innocent life—we've increased the number of mothers choosing life and health, for themselves and their children.⁵⁸ [APPLAUSE].

The need to address quality of life issues—we will see the groundbreaking for a new facility in Wyandotte County to host the American Royal, an internationally significant livestock show and the world's biggest and best barbeque competition.⁵⁹

We will also see the completion of the Flint Hills Nature Trail, a nearly 100 mile trail thru the heart of our beloved tall grass prairie.⁶⁰

The shortage of medical and dental personnel is one of those critical, long-term needs that we must address.

For as long as I can remember, Kansas has experienced a critical shortage of medical doctors, particularly in our rural areas.

We currently have 92 of our 105 counties classified as medically underserved, and 87 of our counties are underserved for dentistry.⁶¹

We are proposing three solutions.

Five million dollars have been placed in the budget to start new residency programs in Kansas. This proposal came from the Rural Healthcare Working Group chaired by Dr. Colyer.⁶²

The second proposal is the establishment of a privately funded Doctor of Osteopathy School in Kansas.⁶³

Osteopathic schools have a higher percentage of their graduates practicing medicine in primary care and in rural areas.⁶⁴ Because our needs are chronic and most acute in rural areas, I have asked Terry Holdren, CEO of the Kansas Farm Bureau, to head the Task Force in bringing a DO school to Kansas.⁶⁵ [APPLAUSE].

This school will follow the little-known medical legacy of one of our most famous Kansans: Phog Allen. Leaving KU for a time, Phog Allen attended medical school and became a Doctor of Osteopathy. He eventually returned to the Jayhawks and bolstered his illustrious career, not only as a coach, but also as a D.O., using his medical training to treat his players' injuries.⁶⁶

Finally, we need dentists, again particularly in our rural areas.⁶⁷

Kansas does not have a dental school and remains dependent on out-of-state schools. This is not a long term solution.

My proposed budget has money to begin the development of a Kansas dental school at the University of Kansas Medical Center. [APPLAUSE].

Let us begin working toward the future now, moving forward to address the chronic health care needs of our state.

According to the most recent information from the federal Child and Family Services Review, our state's foster care program was first in the nation in protecting foster care kids from abuse and second in the nation in safely maintaining children in their homes.⁶⁸ [APPLAUSE]. But other areas require improvement.

To that end, we are working with DCF and KSDE to improve the system for transferring records for youth in foster care. When students in foster care move homes, their school records must also move. This will empower teachers and foster parents to better understand and improve education for students in foster care.⁶⁹ [APPLAUSE].

Preparing for a brighter future also demands action from the legislature regarding Kansas students. The most significant legislative task you face is building a new school funding system that puts students first. [STANDING APPLAUSE].

For decades, the children of Kansas suffered under an overly complicated education finance formula that lacked accountability for results, hand-cuffed local school boards, and spent money unrelated to student achievement.⁷⁰

With the Kansas State Board of Education, we've sought new ideas to better equip Kansas students for the twenty-first century.⁷¹

The time has come to create a school finance system driven by outcomes that provide more opportunities to our students. We need predictability and sustainability for both educators and taxpayers. We need to measure success not by dollars spent, but by the achievement of our students. [APPLAUSE].

Now is the time, this is the session, for us to craft a new school finance system that puts Kansas students first. [STANDING APPLAUSE].

Our founders laid the groundwork for a suitable education for all Kansas students because they knew, as do we, that a key to preserving our liberty is educating the next generation.⁷² We have a moral imperative to improve the educational outcomes, opportunities, and character of every student—in the top of their class, the middle, or the bottom.

As we build this new funding system, we must innovate.

Blue Valley is one of the state's most innovative school districts.⁷³ Their innovation works. Earlier this year, Blue Valley high school students placed second highest in the world for math and science test scores.⁷⁴ Congratulations on your accomplishment. [STANDING APPLAUSE].

Now, we need more innovation.

Projects like the EducationSuperHighway pave the way toward connectivity in the classroom so students can begin interacting with the tools of our time. We must prepare today's students for tomorrow's workforce. Every student, in every classroom, will have affordable, effective, high-speed internet.⁷⁵ [APPLAUSE].

The ability to read is critical. Inventive programs like Kansas Reading Roadmap ensure that struggling students receive the additional help they need to succeed.⁷⁶ Connor Lee is seven years old and full of life. Born with Down Syndrome and several health complications, this young man has worked hard to reach goals that come easy to other children. He joined Kansas Reading Roadmap last August. Spending time with Shelley, his specialist, Connor is now able to better identify letters and words, and reading is right around the bend. Along with his mother, Tanya, this dynamic fellow and his reading specialist Shelley are with us tonight—Connor, can you wave to us? [STANDING APPLAUSE].

We must also acknowledge and support the tens of thousands of Kansans who, like Shelley, dedicate their lives to educating our children. Two of my children teach; I too have taught. Educators are not simply working a job; they are fulfilling a calling. For those teachers leading the way, going above and beyond their duties, funds should be available to provide merit based pay increases.

Kansas has been blessed with a large number of talented, compassionate, and motivated educators. However, across the nation there is a growing demand for teachers.⁷⁷ We must recruit talented educators to come to Kansas, but outdated

regulations sometimes prevent this.⁷⁸ Simple reforms in the teacher certification system can create a pathway bringing more teachers to Kansas.

We also have a responsibility to build up the next generation of educators. We need the best and brightest students following in the footsteps of the teachers that inspired them. But college costs can make this difficult. That is why I've announced the launch of TeachersKan, a new scholarship program for Kansas college students.⁷⁹ If you are a successful Kansas student and commit to teaching in a hard to fill discipline or underserved community, we will help equip you to become a teacher of tomorrow. [APPLAUSE].

Infrastructure and recruitment are partial keys to success, but we must also empower parents with information and choices, creating more competition in our education system. For parental information and transparency, we should create a grading system for our schools to measure and report their status to the public. Parents have the right to know how the performance of their child's school compares to other schools.

The zip code in which you are born should not determine the quality of education you receive. We should expand eligibility of the existing tax exempt scholarship program.⁸⁰ We should continue to build our career and technical education programs that are empowering students to have good paying jobs upon graduation.⁸¹ And we should support education savings accounts that create opportunity for parents and students to improve their academic options.

Capping the education of many Kansas students is a college degree. Yet, while many of our students possess the academic ability to attend college, the financial cost of a bachelor's degree proves prohibitive.⁸²

Kansans deserve access to an affordable college option.

Tonight, I am laying out a challenge to our colleges and universities to provide the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree—in total—for \$15,000 or less.

[APPLAUSE].

While the challenge is great, the potential achievement is greater. I trust that Kansas colleges and universities are fully capable to rise to this call. With success in this field already proven in other states,⁸³ my budget fully funds 50 student scholarships to the institution that first accomplishes the \$15,000 degree.

[APPLAUSE].

There is much work to be done, both in K-12 and higher education, but I am confident that by working together we can create greater opportunity and a brighter future for our students.

You might be familiar with the story of Benjamin Franklin at the end of the Constitutional Convention.

He was the oldest delegate in attendance and had not often spoken during the proceedings, but in his final speech, he stated: "I confess that there are several

parts of this constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them... [The] older I grow the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment, and to pay more respect to the judgment of others.”⁸⁴

The judgment of others has brought each of us here. We owe them our wisdom, our labor, and progress.

Including my time as Secretary of Agriculture, White House Fellow, Congressman, Senator, and Governor—this will be my thirtieth year in public service.

To paraphrase Tony Blair:

‘The danger of longevity in government is fatigue; the benefit is experience.’⁸⁵

If you’ll permit me, some brief words of advice: make relationships your priority, and do things with the long view in mind.

Every day a Legislator faces the tyranny of the ringing phone and the inbox flooding with emails—the urgent crowding out the important. But it is in relationships that we actually get our work done over time.

I have been blessed with many close relationships in my life. My wife being the most important. Many here I have had the chance to grow close to, in good times and in difficult ones.

Here's one such relationship—Mario Goico. He is here tonight, a friend, former legislator, and all around good guy. Mario, I want to see the Right to Try bill you pursued, allowing access to cancer drugs at an earlier stage, pass.⁸⁶ I'll always remember your signature line, "It doesn't get any better than this." [APPLAUSE].

Let me close with a thought on the Great Seal of the State of Kansas.

You have heard often of our state motto, "*Ad Astra Per Aspera,*" *To the Stars Through Difficulty*, a fitting motto for people like ours who have accomplished much and none of it easy.

One of the alternative mottos that was nearly accepted were the simple words, "We will." Not a bad choice either for such a determined and blessed people as we have been.

The picture on the seal represents many aspects of our state's past and present: The buffalo, Native Americans, a steam boat, settlers, farmers, and the home on the range.

But the visual that most catches my eye is the part of the seal easiest to ignore or escape notice altogether. It is the glow of the rising Sun. A glow that is both brilliant and oddly tranquil, almost otherworldly. Quite a contrast to all the action it oversees. That glow speaks to me of a future full of Light and Peace that we will only be achieved through difficulty. A future even beyond the stars.

This is the place our destiny lies. A place sung of in countless churches, synagogues, and places of worship across our vast prairie.

Kansas is a blessed place, a “good land.”⁸⁷ Let us never forget the God of our Forefathers who blessed it and us. And let our eyes never lose sight of the glow from that heavenly place where Peace reigns forevermore!

May God continue to bless the people of our home--Kansas. [STANDING APPLAUSE].

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