

## **Democratic Response to Governor Sam Brownback's State of the State**

January 13, 2014

*The following remarks are from House Minority Leader Paul Davis' speech delivered from Hillcrest Elementary School:*

Good evening. I'm Paul Davis. I'm a lifelong Kansan, a husband, a father and I have the privilege of being the minority leader of the Kansas House of Representatives.

I'm honored to speak to you – my fellow Kansans – about the future of our great state. The future of our communities, our economy, our schools, and our families.

I'm delivering tonight's message from Hillcrest Elementary School, where my mother taught second grade for almost 20 years. And where I was a student myself many years ago.

The quality of education I received in this building shaped my path in life. Just like the education kids are getting in these classrooms today will impact their future – and the future of our economy – for decades to come.

Kids learning in these classrooms will become our teachers, nurses, fire fighters, store clerks – and will play key roles in the success of our economy.

I'm here tonight because I am concerned about our kids, our stalled economy, and the damage the Governor's policies are doing to our middle class families – and those families struggling just to make ends meet.

Governor Brownback and his Road Map for Kansas are leading our state in the wrong direction.

Our schools are suffering, jobs remain scarce, and property taxes are sky-rocketing. Meanwhile, big, politically connected corporations seem to get all the breaks.

According to the latest jobs report – released just a few weeks ago – there are 16,000 *fewer* Kansans working than when Governor Brownback took office. On top of that, public school class sizes are growing, teachers have been laid off by the thousands, and it's more expensive than ever to send your child to a Kansas college.

We need to go in a different direction. Education. Hard work. A strong middle class. Cooperation. These values are what MAKE us Kansans.

And if we work together – Republicans, Democrats, and Independents – we can restore the state we love.

As I've traveled across Kansas, I've heard stories much different than the story Governor Brownback told tonight.

I've visited with real Kansans who are struggling under the burden of Governor Brownback's agenda.

People like Kristen from Great Bend. She has a college degree and has been looking for a job that pays the bills for months. But all she can find is a minimum wage job.

Kristen loves living in Kansas, but fears she may have to leave just to find a good paying job. She wonders where all the jobs are that the governor claims to have created.

I've also heard from parents who fear for their child's future. They've watched their child's class size increase, seen their child's teacher laid off, and many parents – just like those here at Hillcrest school – have had to worry that their child's school may close.

I've heard from Kansas seniors living on fixed incomes, who know their budget is being stretched by skyrocketing property taxes. And they were hurt even more when Governor Brownback cut the mortgage interest deduction.

And I've seen all my family's bills go up because the cost of merely being a Kansan is getting out of control.

Property taxes, up in 86 of our 105 counties, are projected to rise even more.

The sales tax has shot up – causing you to pay more than you should for almost everything you buy, including food.

And college tuition at every state university is soaring – like at Wichita State where the increase this year alone is more than eight percent – with no end in sight.

And these costs impact our working families most of all. And they have gone up as a direct result of this governor's policies.

The biggest thing a governor does is make choices.

And Governor Brownback has made a lot of bad choices in recent years. One of which was the choice to conduct a so-called "experiment" on our state – our home.

Two years ago, Governor Brownback pushed through a tax plan that was so reckless it is now crippling our state. He called it a "real live experiment," and promised that it would be like a "shot of adrenaline" to the Kansas economy.

At first, many observers said the plan was so irresponsible and so costly that it would never become law. Economists across the political spectrum named it the worst tax plan in the entire country.

But the Governor forged recklessly ahead. And promised immediate results. Now, the Governor says it will take *years* for Kansans to see any significant job growth.

*Years?*

Seniors living on fixed incomes can't afford "years" of higher property taxes.

Our kids can't wait "years" for the state to restore its commitment to public education.

And most importantly, Kansans like Kristen from Great Bend - *cannot* wait "years" to find a good job as the bills pile up – many driven deeper into poverty.

The Governor turned our state into a science lab to conduct his "experiment." And now, three years later, the results are in: We have fewer jobs than when we started and our state is struggling.

The Brownback experiment has failed.

This experimental tax plan was passed in the name of job creation, but what company finds this kind of business climate appealing?

I've been a member of my local chamber of commerce for well over fifteen years, and I've never heard from business owners who believe that a plan that raises taxes on middle class families will actually help our economy.

I've never heard the business community ask a governor to make the largest cut to public schools in state history – resulting in a less educated workforce.

One mother – Heather Ousley of Merriam – was so concerned about Governor Brownback's education cuts that she *walked* 60 miles from her home all the way to Topeka to send a message to state leaders that school funding needed to be restored.

Heather saw the damage being done to her local schools and had enough. Her children, and all our children, only get one shot at their precious, formative years. There is no time to waste.

Sadly, Governor Brownback and most lawmakers didn't pay attention to Heather.

During the economic recession, Kansas schools embraced a spirit of shared sacrifice and absorbed funding cuts along with every other state agency.

But when the country began to recover, it was time to begin restoring that funding. And I offered a plan to do just that.

Instead, the Governor and his allies chose to cut our schools even more – and gave massive tax breaks to a narrow group who need help the least.

This choice sent a message to parents, teachers, working families, and the Kansas Supreme Court.

The original goals of the Brownback Road Map were admirable. But time and again, the numbers just never seem to add up.

Governor Brownback promised to create jobs, but there are fewer jobs now than there were three years ago.

He promised to cut taxes, but all he really did was shift the tax burden onto working families.

He promised to strengthen our schools, but he made the largest cut to public education in state history. And a year later test scores dropped for the first time in over a decade.

And he promised to reduce childhood poverty, but the number of kids living in poverty has increased dramatically while he's been governor.

It's time to change direction.

Sitting in this familiar classroom tonight, I'm filled with memories.

Kansas is a special place to call home. We have a remarkable history, and it's important to hold the memories and lessons of the past close.

But leadership is about the *future*.

Next week, my daughter turns four years old. Soon she will be walking into a classroom - just like this one - for the very first time.

Make no mistake, the decisions that are made in the State Capitol over the next several months are going to resonate for years.

This is personal to me. It's about my family, and my daughter's future. And it's about *your* family and the future of *your* children and grandchildren.

They deserve to walk into classrooms like this one, with the resources they need to succeed.

Yes, we absolutely have a moral obligation to educate our children. But strong schools are also the very foundation of a stronger economy.

The next generation of Kansas leaders, innovators, and job creators is being molded today - in *these* rooms. We *must* invest in them.

This is far more complicated than political talking points about “big government” vs. “small government.”

This is about *smart* government. It’s about finding the balance between high quality schools, low taxes, and a climate that will truly create jobs and help small businesses thrive.

If we embrace a moderate, commonsense approach – where we work together to find real solutions – we *can* achieve that balance.

And we *must*.

Because ultimately, we’re all in this together.

And if we can’t get the Kansas economy back to a place where it works for everybody – very soon – it won’t work for *anybody*.

Thank you for joining me tonight, and may God bless the great state of Kansas.

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