

## **Kansas Fact Meter: Wobbly claims by Sam Brownback mark ‘partly true’ State of State**

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January 15, 2018

Kansas Fact Meter looked at more than 15 assertions by Gov. Sam Brownback in his final speech to the Kansas Legislature. The majority held up to scrutiny, but a few misleading or false statements led Fact Meter to categorize the overall speech as “partly true.”

Gov. Sam Brownback celebrated in his victory-lap State of the State speech the state’s reduction in the rates of childhood poverty and infant mortality.

He also offered a personal version of the late Rev. Martin Luther King’s famous “I Have A Dream” speech, offering aspirational targets in economics, education, health care, energy, agriculture, abortion and race relations.

“Kansas is a dreamer’s paradise,” Brownback said. “I dream of a Kansas where poverty is on the run.”

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The second-term Republican governor said he was proud the childhood poverty rate fell from 19 percent in 2012 to 14 percent in 2016. He highlighted the state’s 2015 and 2016 infant mortality rate of 5.9 deaths per 1,000 births. It’s down from 6.3 deaths per 1,000 births in 2014.

Annie McKay, president of Kansas Action for Children, said Brownback’s statistics were accurate but the numbers didn’t tell the whole story.

“Those gains are not being realized by every Kansas child,” she said. “Children of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. The death rate for black babies is nearly three times higher than the mortality rate for white or Hispanic infants.”

Brownback correctly reported 17,000 fewer abortions occurred in Kansas during the past six years than the previous six-year period. In 2005 to 2010, Kansas had 61,000 abortions. From 2011 to 2016, there were 44,000.

“I dream of a culture of life where every life at every stage is celebrated and cherished,” Brownback said.

In the speech, Brownback fondly recalled former Hutchinson Rep. Jan Pauls, who was a Democrat before flipping allegiance to the GOP in 2014. She was defeated for re-election in 2016 by Democrat Patsy Terrell, of Hutchinson.

“She lost her last election when she wouldn’t compromise her values,” Brownback said.

His mistake was declaring Pauls passed away after Terrell. In fact, Terrell died in Topeka in June. Pauls’ death occurred in July.

Brownback, who proposed answering a Kansas Supreme Court ruling with \$600 million in new state aid to K-12 districts, said he doubted massive injection of tax dollars guaranteed better student outcomes. He referenced the 1985 takeover of the Kansas City, Mo., schools by a federal judge who found the district unconstitutionally segregated. Judicial orders led to about \$2 billion in spending over a dozen years.

“One need look now further than the Kansas City, Mo., school district — sometimes called America’s most costly educational failure,” Brownback said.

He referenced a 1998 study by the Cato Institute and a 1994 analysis by the Harvard Project on School Desegregation. The Cato Institute denounced judicial intrusion into the district. The Harvard Project, however, concluded formation of special magnet schools to address racial isolation and academic achievement produced “modest gains.”

The governor said he was pleased Kansas cut adult obesity in 2016 from 34.2 percent to 31.2 percent. That’s a higher rate than Colorado, the nation’s best at 22.3 percent.

“It’s always hard for us to say why a rate goes up or down over the course of a year,” said Don Schwarz, a vice president at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Brownback correctly noted Kansas had a record 1.4 million people employed and the “lowest unemployment rate we’ve seen since 2000.”

In November, Kansas had 1,435,126 people with jobs. That’s above the pre-recession September 2008 benchmark of 1,433,566. The state’s preliminary unemployment rate for November was 3.5 percent. The rate in January and February 2000 was 3.4 percent.

Brownback was on the money with claims the Flint Hills Nature Trail was longest in the state, the University of Kansas Medical Center opened a medical education building, a dry milk plant was christened in Garden City, the American Royal rodeo and livestock show plans a move to Wyandotte County and a National Soccer Training Center was established in Kansas City, Kan.