



Brownback Gets An ‘A’ For Politically Dangerous Tax Cuts

By Rachel Stoltzfoos

October 2, 2014

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback may be in trouble with the voters, but the Cato Institute gave him an “A” Thursday.

Brownback is one of only four governors to receive an “A” rating on the libertarian think tank’s fiscal policy report card, and he tied North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory for the highest score of 78.

Governors were graded on their approach to taxing and spending policy since 2012 — those whose proposals and policies reflected a smaller-government approach to taxing and spending received a better grade.

The report praises Brownback for not only slashing tax rates, but also balancing the budget by cutting spending. He cut the income tax rate from 6.45 percent to 4.9 percent in 2012, and that rate is scheduled to drop to 3.9 percent by 2018.

According to the report, his plan will save Kansas taxpayers \$800 million a year.

Brownback offset the cuts with an increase in the sales tax from 5.7 to 6.15 percent, and has balanced the budget in the past few years. But slow economic growth and projected gaps in future budgets caused Moody’s Investors Service to downgrade the state’s credit rating this year, and critics are blaming Brownback’s tax cuts.

A new USA Today/Suffolk University poll released Thursday shows his Democrat opponent Paul Davis ahead by 4 points — more bad news in a traditionally red state where the same poll shows Republican Sen. Pat Roberts trailing his independent challenger Greg Orman.

A Brownback loss would deal a blow to conservative fiscal policy around the country, as other Republican governors would likely think twice before enacting similar reforms.

Cato's report acknowledged the criticism, but maintained the cuts are good for the economy in the long run. "Some Kansas legislators may view slower revenue growth as a terrible problem," reads the report, "but it creates an opportunity for them to improve government efficiency and cut unneeded programs."

In addition to Brownback and McCrory, Republican Govs. Paul LePage of Maine and Mike Pence of Indiana also received "A" ratings. California's Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown is rated the worst in the country, and scored just 19 out of 100 points.