

US: Kansas legislature passes budget slashing education

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The Kansas state legislature passed a budget plan on Sunday that forces workers and youth to pay for the state's budget shortfall. The proposal comes after repeated cuts to business taxes and to programs upon which working class Kansans rely.

The plan will gouge the state's universities, colleges, and community colleges of tens of millions of dollars. The University of Kansas Lawrence campus will lose over \$5 million, and the KU Medical Center will lose \$8 million. Kansas State University will take a hit of over \$6 million. Overall, state funding for higher education has fallen to \$763 million this year from \$829 million in 2008—a reduction of about 8 percent.

The assault on the living conditions of the working class comes hand-in-hand with bipartisan giveaways to the financial elite. In 2012, Kansas slashed the top two individual income tax rates and rates for corporations. It also exempted all pass-through business income, becoming the first state to do so. The 2012 plan included provisions to eliminate food sales tax rebates, homestead property tax refunds, and child tax credits for the poor and working class.

The tax cuts and this year's revenue cuts amount to a massive transfer of wealth from the working class to the ruling class, orchestrated by the two big business parties, headed by Republican Governor Sam Brownback. Democrats, while vastly outnumbered in both the Kansas House and Senate, are agreed on the need for cuts and are implementing similar measures in states throughout the country.

Indebted and cash strapped youth are expected to make up for the cuts. State data show that tuition has increased 37 percent at the University of Kansas from 2008 to 2013. Kansas State tuition rose about 30 percent. Far from an isolated incident, the situation in Kansas is part of a nationwide effort to transform

American post-secondary education into a system exclusively available for the rich.

The government is preparing a wider onslaught on the social rights of the working class, which will lead to more misery for the working class in future years. An estimate by Brownback's budget division shows that Kansas will burn through all its cash reserves and will cut \$64 million in 2014 if no tax policy changes are approved. That amount will balloon to \$545 million in cuts in 2015.

On May 28, Democrats and Republicans in the state House rejected Brownback's proposal to extend a temporary six-tenths of a cent sales tax hike that is slated to expire in July. The sales tax hike was to reduce cuts to education funding as well as reduce and eventually eliminate personal income tax.

In other words, the legislature was divided as to whether to force the working class to bear the burden of paying for higher education through a regressive sales tax, or whether to slash higher education altogether while continuing to drastically increase tuition costs. The legislature opted for the latter, and Brownback is expected to pass or veto the measure in the coming days.

Kansas' spending cuts and taxation reductions for the wealthy correspond to an increase in the social needs of the majority of the state's population. A Census Bureau study that included data through 2011 found that the average Kansas household had lost approximately \$7,000 in real income over the past decade, and that the poverty rate had increased. The number of children in high poverty areas tripled between 2000 and 2010. Conditions have undoubtedly worsened since then.

Even the state's wealthiest county, Johnson County, among the most affluent in the United States, has been affected. More than 12 percent of Johnson County

children ages five and younger lived below the poverty line in 2011, a figure up from 4.5 percent in 2008. More than 23,000 pupils in the county's public schools qualified for free or reduced-price lunches in the 2012-13 school year—triple the number from a decade ago



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