

Narrative analysis and framing of Governor Brownback's state funding crisis in 2015:
a case study of press secretary Eileen Hawley

by

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B.A., University of Kansas 2012.

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Journalism and Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2019

Approved by:

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Abstract

Sam Brownback's tumultuous tenure as Governor of Kansas required talented public relations people to work with the media and help him sell his budget ideas to the state. His second of three Communications Directors, Eileen Hawley, served at the time of Brownback's 2015 tax cuts that caused a massive budget shortfall, plunging the state into a financial crisis.

This case study examines the effectiveness of framing strategies used by Hawley, who employed a more politically neutral stance during her messaging surrounding the Kansas budget shortfall. This study uses in-depth interviews with Hawley and Statehouse reporters to assess Hawley's strategies in handling the ensuing financial crisis. Previous studies have shown that communications directors who present material in a more neutral manner gain the trust of the media, and therefore their frames have more saliency in the press. This study reveals mixed results in using such a strategy, with generally negative assessments from Capital reporters.

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Chapter 1- Introduction

This case study looks into how framing plays a part in a controversial budget crisis in Kansas during the year 2015. By using in-depth interviews this study aims to see how Eileen Hawley, a politically neutral communications director for Governor Sam Brownback in the state of Kansas framed messages about the budget shortfall crisis and how the local statehouse media reframed those messages and created frames of their own. 2015 was a tumultuous year when it became obvious that the tax cuts had not stimulated the economy as planned, and had instead create a funding crisis for schools and other state agencies.

Studies have shown that politically neutral communications directors are trusted more by the media, who then are more likely to accept the frames presented by the communications professional (G. Bentele & R. Seidenglanz, 2008). This study looks to see if Eileen Hawley, who was politically neutral in her communication was effective as a communications director, and if her frames had any salience with the media. Framing theory states that framing tells people what to think about and how they should think about it, this study looks at a controversial situation and how framing was used by the governor's communications office and the media.

Press secretaries have been a function of government since Woodrow Wilson's presidency, with Joe Tumulty often being cited as the first modern presidential press secretary (Bloomfield, 1965). Press secretaries are now an integral part of government, and can be found at every level of government, but scholars have mostly studied these professionals at the presidential level (Kiouisis & Strömback, 2010; Bloomfield, 1965; Towle, 1997; Martinelli & Mucciarone, 2007; Rutland, 1957). The function of press secretaries has been studied by many scholars, but most have focused on a press secretary's (often referred to a "communications director") relationships with the political leader for which they have worked (Cook, 1988;

Kiousis & Strömback, 2010; Turk, 1985; Bloomfield, 1965; Downes, 1998). As the role has expanded, these professionals have often become the face of the administrations for which they work. At the state level of government, communications teams are often composed of just one or two people who fulfill all roles including that of the communications director and press secretary. Presidential press secretaries and gubernatorial communications directors essentially fill the same roles. However, presidential press secretaries play one role in a larger team at the presidential level that includes a communications director and several deputies and aides, but a governor's communications director must fill all such roles from communications director to press secretary mostly on their own although, sometimes a communications director has a deputy director that helps them in their duties.

White House press secretaries are essentially the face of a given administration that the media and citizens see almost every day, charged with presenting the White House's slant on important issues, as well as shaping the image of the president. But people who have had these roles have had varying levels of success, depending on the relationship that they have with the press and the president (Towle, 1997; Bloomfield, 1965; Rutland, 1957; Liebovitch, 1989; Kumar, 2001; Martinelli & Mucciarone, 2007). Press secretaries who are in the president's inner circle and involved with decision-making and creating messages are more successful than those press secretaries who are merely a mouthpiece for an administration or who are excluded from the president's inner circle.

Kumar (2001) examined the role of a press secretary finding four primary duties or functions: serving as an information conduit, promoting constituent representation, administering the communication department, and planning communications. As an information outlet, the press secretary's job is to distribute correct information to the press in the voice of the president.

Having meetings every day with the president is helpful in getting to know the chief executive's views on issues and events. Meeting with different agencies and the chief of staff is helpful for acquiring accurate information to disseminate to the press. As Kumar (2001) stated, "A press secretary has three constituents-the President, the White House staff, and the representatives of news organizations- and one boss: the president" (p. 302). A press secretary should build a relationship of trust with the press. The administrative role in this job involves the dissemination of information, coordination of logistics of events and White House coverage, and collaboration with other departments and agencies. Handling the media and providing information to the press remains the most important part of the job for a presidential press secretary.

President William McKinley started the modern relationship with the White House press corps. When McKinley was inaugurated in 1897, there was no formal relationship between the White House and the press (Ponder, 1994), but by the time McKinley was assassinated in 1901, the press had a space to work inside the White House, there was an established routine and procedures for monitoring the press and releasing statements, and there was a way to manage the press as a group. McKinley had used the press to gain favor with the public during the Spanish American war by addressing and framing concerns. Statements by the president were copied and handed out to the press, who came for comments before a more organized strategy was developed.

Whether at the national or state level, the role of the communications professional who deals with the media cannot be understated. The function of press secretaries differs depending on what politician they work for and the relationship they have with that individual. Towle (1997) looked at nine presidential press secretaries starting with the Eisenhower administration and ending with the Carter years. These press secretaries all worked differently depending on

their relationship with the press, the president, and if they were a mouthpiece for the administration or involved in decision-making. Towle looked at the successes of these secretaries depending on their roles, if they were a mouthpiece or a representative of the president. The most interesting finding of his study was that Pierre Salinger was an unsuccessful press secretary for the Kennedy administration because he was a mouthpiece and not in Kennedy's circle. However Salinger became a trusted advisor for Lyndon B. Johnson and was successful being a part of LBJ's kitchen cabinet.

At the state level, press secretaries fulfill an important role of communicating with a more localized constituency. In fact, a governor's relationship with local media outlets is often determined by the personality and skill of the communications professional representing the governor's office. For example, Martin and Singletary (1981) point out that analyzing press releases coming from the state government can illustrate how much local newspapers buy into information coming from a press secretary, and consequently, the governor. And various studies have been done to gauge the effectiveness of this process in given states. In 1994 Sean Walsh was appointed the press secretary for California's governor Pete Wilson (Spragens, 2003). During Walsh's time as press secretary, Governor Wilson pushed education reform in California. Walsh said that for policy, it was best to have a press secretary on the ground floor so that "the press secretary then can predict problems associated with a policy or program before it's laid out to the public and the media" (Spragen, 2003, p. 78). When involved with the governor and his team directly, the press secretary can build public relations strategies before handling the press. Credibility is also an important issue for Walsh, being able to be calm and credible to the media is important to make sure to retain the media's trust regarding policy issues. Walsh faced two battles daily: one with the media and one with the staff who may not like or trust the media.

Press secretaries should be able to listen to the media because they know what works and what doesn't and can be more helpful than the press secretary's staff. Walsh described his role of press secretary as an informer and not an educator, while putting the governor's views in the best possible light.

April Salter Herrle was the communications director for Florida's Governor Lawton Chiles in the late 1990s. For Herrle being a good communications director involved thinking on her feet, understanding complex situations, and being able to take those situations and explain them at their simplest level (Spragens, 2003). Having to earn the trust of the governor is one of the most important parts of the job, according to Herrle. The communications director is an advisor and spokesperson to the governor. Being an advisor is a more important role because it helps to avoid missteps and controversy. Additionally, credibility is important because it helps the communications director inform and reinforce as well as keeping tone and message on target for the governor. Herrle believed that the Internet created a better medium for a communications office in being able to get more information to the staff and media and to directly inform the public. Herrle posited that keeping a good relationship with the press is critical and can help maintain credibility, while a bad relationship with the press can destroy the press secretary.

Mike Dawson served as the press secretary to Ohio's Governor George Voinovich from 1991 to 1999 (Spragens, 2003). Dawson believed that press secretaries need to be a trusted confidant and advisor to the governor they work for or else they will be ineffective. The press secretary's function is to be the voice of the governor when the governor is not available to speak. Dawson said that dealing with television media is more difficult than print media. Print media already understands how the state house works and covers it regularly. Television wants to cover an issue immediately and doesn't have as much time or background to cover the issue. It

is also important for a press secretary to be personable for television more than in print. Dawson said that whatever the press decides to focus on elevates the situation and puts it under a microscope, which places importance on the press secretary's relationship with the press.

John Truscott was the communications director for Michigan's Governor John Engler. Truscott said that a press secretary's role is to "be accessible to the news media and answer their questions. You must represent your boss on every level accurately. You are the voice of the President or the Governor, and you have to represent him or her appropriately" (Spragens, 2003 p. 100). The press secretary has an important role to the governor by knowing the press and how the governor's policies will play out with the press. Consequently, the press secretary needs to be involved in this aspect to perform their job well. Being part of the governor's inner circle is again stressed by Truscott. Knowing background information and policy makes you credible with reporters and helps to anticipate problems and missteps in the administration. Truscott stresses that a good relationship with the media is important: "you never want to mislead or lie, do that once and you're done" (p. 104).

Ilene Hoffer was the press secretary for Massachusetts Governor Paul Cellucci. Hoffer said that it is the governor's job to decide what they want from a press secretary, but that a press secretary's real job is "...bringing the political viewpoint to the policy discussion" (Spragens, 2003 p. 112). Hoffer describes another key part of the job of press secretary as being able to make sure all of the other executive political offices are following the message of the governor. Dealing with the press is different for each medium. Print is more focused on by a press secretary because they have more time than television reporters to do a story, especially when journalists take days or weeks to do an investigative story that is more in-depth than television or radio stories. Relationships are important, especially with the governor and the press; not having good

relationships can make the job harder. Hoffer stresses that the media is how the people get to know the governor; most won't get to meet them and they will get all of their information about the governor and their policies through the press.

Robert Gierka was the public information officer for North Carolina Governor James Hunt for four years. Gierka says that the role of a press secretary "includes research, verifying facts and information, and then making sure the wording of your responses and explanations is clear. The role is not to create impressions to establish some kind of political advantage" (Spragens, 2003 p. 121). The role of advisor to the governor is an important one; it keeps the press secretary from being surprised by policy decisions and events in the governor's office. Gierka believes a good press secretary must have a trusting relationship with the governor, know the style of the governor, and also be aware of the internal audience. A background and knowledge of media as well as a good relationship with the media is important. Being able to understand the media and know when to get information out at the right time is key. Geirka believes the Internet is the most difficult medium through which to control information and disseminate correct information.

Framing Theory and Narrative Analysis in Public Relations

McCombs and Shaw (1972) studied the 1968 U.S. presidential election and discovered that the media can influence its audience by telling them which stories to think about, which is the theory of agenda setting. Framing is concerned with agenda setting, in that the media tells people what to think about but also how they should think about those issues making them more salient to the audience. By the media telling its audience what to think about and how to think about it by framing an issue in a certain way they can influence the choices that people make.

Reese (2001) describes framing as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, and works symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (p.11). Framing is the way the media organizes and makes sense of the world, and in turn, passes that frame to consumers. Framing has been used to help make sense of how the media covers politics, showing audience members how to think about a given topic. Framing thus, makes us study our social understanding of the world and how that is structured and tied to interests to influence how the news is viewed.

McCombs (2005), describes framing as a dominant attribute in a message, where attributes defining a central theme is a frame. Framing can be used as a compelling argument, where the salience of a frame and the ways of organizing and structuring that frame are what leads the audience to see a message in a certain way.

Framing is composed of selection and salience. Entman (1993) describes framing as a way to define problems, which are usually measured by cultural values. To frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p.52). Frames also have four locations in the communications process with a communicator, a text, a receiver and a culture. These frames then organize belief systems and guides audience thinking. Entman notes that frames have an important role in political communication, where frames can call attention to some part of reality while obscuring other parts that could lead audiences to have different reactions to the information. Politicians and journalists compete over the framing of news, each offering different frames of their chosen views.

Issues can be reframed depending on the coverage of a news event to focus on different aspects surrounding the occurrence (Chyi and McCombs, 2004). This frame changing can be done consciously or unconsciously to keep the story fresh while it is being reported on. Reframing typically occurs during a major news event that is being covered over a long period of time. News events can be framed and reframed into several levels including that of the individual, the community, the region, societal and of the international level. Frame changing is a dynamic process and over time issues are focused from very specific to a general topic that often is framed as a societal problem. The amount of coverage on a certain topic also increases its salience, making the audience recognize the topic as more important because of the amount of coverage it generates.

Framing is used in governmental public relations to inform others how certain events should be viewed and interpreted. Goffman (1974) described framing as a situation that is interpreted and depicted according to the participants of an organization that govern events and our involvement in them. Framing can be conducted by public relations professionals and by the media, to explore mechanisms by which the public and media can both build frames around political issues (Sheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

In a political context, the framing of issues becomes important because it is a way to examine different interpretations of social reality (Hallahan, 1999). Politicians often frame issues to fit into their perceived reality of what is happening or what they think is happening. Issues in framing become important to the publics that politicians represent. "Issues frequently result in extensive public discussion and frequently require resolution within a public policy forum, such as a legislature or the courts. Issues are the bases around which publics are organized and public opinion is formed" (p. 217).

Framing can also be viewed in the context of attributing responsibility, which can either be accepted or avoided. In government, controversy over laws and events can cause press secretaries to frame events to allot responsibility to others in the government or outside of the government. Hallahan (1999) argued that when controversy emerges, the framing of responsibility can become avoidant, “when involved in controversy, however, an organization might want to pursue a strategy of responsibility avoidance” (p. 227).

Press secretaries can use narrative analysis to frame stories and to influence the public. People have a natural tendency to think in narratives (Shenhav, 2005), and narrative analysis is a tool used by press secretaries to influence the public by engaging in the construction of messages and their meanings (Hallahan, 1999). Additionally, power structures can be determined using narrative analysis. Political narratives can contain elements of persuasion that differ from a faithful representation of political reality (Shenhav, 2006). How someone sets up the narrative can show how the balance of power is being influenced or manipulated.

Framing is an organizing principle that is used to socially construct the way that people view the world (Carter, 2013). The media uses framing by focusing on one aspect of an event and then presenting it to their consumers to construct reality. The growth of mass media and social platforms has created many more ways and channels over which framing can happen. The media can influence the general public about certain political issues by framing them in a negative or positive way. Journalists write stories in a narrative manner and construct frames to fit those stories, which can represent reality subjectively instead of objectively. Frames are also present in each different media outlet such as, in newspapers where stories viewed as more important are placed on the front page, while on television more important stories are at the top of the show or categorized as breaking news.

Reese (2007) argues that framing, as a structure, draws boundaries, sets up categories, defines ideas as out or in, and snags related ideas into a net of active process. Using framing, meaning can be embedded across media and time. Frames are also dynamic and can project knowledge as they guide the structure of new content. Organizations in narratives can be determined by laying out the complex and interdependent relationships that happen between narratives, power, and ideology in organizations (Mumby, 1987). People understand the world through stories. Politicians tell stories to influence voters and to help the public to understand the current political climate. Political discourse often relies on narrative patterns, just as people rely on narrative as a way of understanding the world and giving it meaning (Shenhav, 2006).

Narratives are important in the political realm as they shape the stories that press secretaries tell the public and the media. Press secretaries can take a narrative and use it to manage issues by telling the narrator's side of the story. Effective issues management controls the issue in the media or public policy agenda (Hallahan, 1999). Politicians assert their control through narrative via press secretaries and have been successful in creating a narrative to frame issues.

Political narratives are constructed and shaped, but that doesn't determine how well they do at representing political reality. Even if it is clear that narrative isn't indicative of political reality, it doesn't mean that all narratives are equally true or equally false (Shenhav, 2006).

Framing and Governor Brownback

This case study involves a controversial budget crisis in Kansas during the year 2015. Sam Brownback, initially elected governor in 2010 and inaugurated 2011, signed a massive tax cut into law a year later in 2012, claiming that the legislation was needed to stimulate the Kansas

economy. Brownback, a conservative Republican in a state where a majority of voters identify as Republicans, nonetheless experienced a contentious relationship with voters, state agencies, segments of the legislature and the media during most of his time as governor, from his first inauguration in 2011 to 2017, as he left the governorship prematurely to assume an appointment in the Trump administration. Perhaps one of the more tumultuous times in his administration was the year 2015 it became obvious that the tax cuts had not stimulated the economy as planned, and had instead create a funding crisis for schools and other state agencies.

Studies have shown that politically neutral communications directors are trusted more by the media, who then are more likely to accept the frames presented by the communications professional (Bentele & Seidenglanz, 2008). In this regard, Brownback eschewed the temptation to hire a professional political communicator to manage the negative treatment his policies received from the state's news media, instead turning to Eileen Hawley, a former communications professional from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, who served as the governor's communications director from June 2013 to November 2016. Prior to her role as Governor Brownback's Communications Director, Hawley spent fifteen years at NASA at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, where she was Director of External Communications and a key advisor during the Columbia shuttle crisis in 2003. During her time with NASA, Hawley was the "Voice of Mission Control" for more than 40 Space Shuttle and Space Station Missions, including John Glenn's historic return to space in 1998. After working at NASA, Hawley and her husband moved to Lawrence, Kansas, to teach at the University of Kansas. Hawley was a lecturer at KU and also worked for the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce. In 2013, Hawley was recruited to work for the Brownback administration to help manage the governor's bad press by helping him minimize or redirect the blame for negative events

happening in Kansas during budget shortfalls. Hawley's job at NASA had involved little political fire branding, and her appointment was seen as a way to build more trust with the media and help dampen the negative image of the Governor and his controversial tax cuts. Representing a controversial governor and political issue is a difficult task, one that required Hawley to employ several strategies to make issues seem less destructive than they were, and her attempts to frame the budget crisis in 2015 are the focus of this study.

Sam Brownback's Bad Year

The budget shortfall increasingly came to light shortly after 2012 when the governor's tax program became law. The legislation essentially reduced and eliminated income taxes for 330,000 businesses (Carpenter, 2012), which created a revenue shortfall incapable of adequately funding other state agencies and projects. The 2015 legislative session began with a \$279 million budget shortfall that was estimated to turn into a 436-million-dollar deficit during the year (Carpenter, 2015a). This deficit was complicated by a Kansas Supreme Court ruling in December of 2014 that dictated that schools needed more funding. The ruling was not welcomed by Brownback and the Republican majority. These problems came right after Governor Brownback's narrow re-election victory in November of 2014. Before the 2015 legislative session, Governor Brownback announced cuts to "\$96 million from the Kansas Department of Transportation and seizure of \$55 million from a Medicaid pharmacy rebate created by the Affordable Care act and \$41 million from the state's pension fund" (Carpenter, 2015a, para. 5) as a quick fix to the budget deficit.

In January 2015, receipts were \$47.2 million short of revenue predictions. In response, Governor Brownback cut funding to public schools and higher education by \$44.5 million

dollars (Eligon, 2015). January also brought a proposal for a hike in 'sin' taxes to help the state create more revenue (Carpenter & Shorman, 2015). The proposed tax hike would incorporate an increase of more than \$100 million in state taxes on liquor, cigarettes, and tobacco sales. During the State of the State Address, Brownback promised that Kansas would continue its march towards zero income taxes while issuing an emergency four percent rollback in spending to fight the budget deficit.

By February, Brownback made executive cuts to higher education, which did not require legislative approval, to keep the state solvent (Lowry, 2015a). These cuts went into effect on March 7 and saved the state \$44.5 million. Brownback argued that school funding was driving the state's budget woes, and did not bring up the cuts to income tax as part of the problem. Rhonda Holman (2015) of *The Wichita Eagle* editorial board wrote a condemning opinion piece about the income tax cuts and its effects on school funding, focusing on Brownback's refusal to acknowledge the income tax cuts as part of the budget crisis and his decision to blame public schools for the problem. Holman quoted Reps. Finch, Rooker, Dierks, and Moxley about their budget concerns while calling on Brownback to admit his faults and fix the budget. *The Kansas City Star* covered the events by focusing on the automatic cuts called allotments that reduced the universities' budgets by two percent and the K-12 education budget by another 1.5 percent, which cut a total of \$44.5 million from the budget before legislators had a chance to consider a spending bill (Lowry, 2015b). *The Star* focused on Brownback's desire to reformulate a school spending bill because of inequitable funding, as was evidenced by a Kansas City, Kansas, school district bought a \$48,000 grand piano. Brownback believed that this piano purchase was proof of a bad school funding formula.

In February, *The Topeka Capital-Journal* covered a rally conducted by the Kansas Public Retirement System (KPERs) beneficiaries, who were against Brownback's budget proposal (Carpenter, 2015b). The state withheld \$58 million in scheduled payments to the Kansas Public Retirement System. KPERs beneficiaries said that taking money away from KPERs is unfair to government employees such as teachers and firefighters who have dedicated themselves to public work. The Governor urged the legislature to authorize \$1.5 billion in bonds to provide capital to the KPERs' portfolio.

In March, *The Kansas City Star* published an opinion column criticizing Brownback's tax cuts. The article noted that Missouri, which did not cut taxes, outperformed Kansas in terms of creating job growth (Abouhalkah, 2015), and that Kansas was lagging behind the national average. *The Cowley Courier-Traveler* covered the Supreme Court ruling ordering the state to provide adequate funding for schools, noting that the school funding overhaul was due to Brownback's economic policy that caused the budget shortfall in Kansas (Clayton, 2015). That newspaper also noted that the state was looking at a \$600 million shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year starting in July.

Due to the budget shortfall, Governor Brownback signed a new bill that funded schools through block-funding grants (Shorman, 2015a), saying that the block-funding grants would provide \$300 million more in funding, which Brownback called it a critical step in subsidizing schools. Brownback contradicted himself by saying that school funding was part of Kansas' budget shortfall issues, while also positing that giving more money for schools would help alleviate the problem.

During the legislative session in April, the governor and legislators were facing a looming problem, "an approximately \$800 million revenue shortfall, according to figures and

documents provided to lawmakers by Legislative Research” (Shorman, 2015b). At this point in time, spending was expected to exceed revenue. The Governor had earlier proposed \$474 million in revenue and tax adjustments for “liquor and cigarette tax hikes, a tax amnesty program and other changes. The governor also plan[ned] \$132 million in transfers from the highway fund (Shorman, 2015b).” In April, even with the proposed tax cuts, the state still needed to find \$131 million by either making new revenue or cutting spending.

In April, national media and some Kansas newspapers started to focus on the budget crisis in the state. *The Atlantic* focused on what they called Kansas’s “failed experiment” (Berman, 2015). After Brownback’s tough re-election race, where the state budget and school finance were the main issues, Berman’s article in *The Atlantic* focused on how conservatives should take heed that their trickle-down tax policies can’t work, as evidenced by the growing budget shortfall in Kansas. The article argued that brashly cutting taxes (that did nothing to fuel the economy or create jobs) while increasing consumption taxes and cutting funding from schools, highways, and health care was a poor plan to fix bad policies. Berman pointed out that other states have not copied Kansas’s policies, stating that the blowback from the budget shortfall has scared other states away from making deep tax cuts.

In May, *The Kansas City Star* editorial writer Yael Abouhalkah (2015), called Governor Brownback “Mr. Irrelevant” in a column dedicated to the disconnect between what Brownback wanted to do with taxes and what the state legislature was doing in the new tax bill. The legislature discussed decreasing sales taxes and ending tax exemptions used by schools, hospitals, and other non-profits, while Brownback wanted to increase sales taxes. The column argued that Brownback’s 2012 tax cuts as causing the state’s budget crisis.

The month of June continued to haunt Governor Brownback with bad press. The *Lawrence Journal World* criticized his efforts to march to zero, by phasing out income taxes (Hancock, 2015a). The *Journal World* highlighted the apprehensions that some Republican lawmakers were having to the march toward zero and wanting to find alternatives to fix the growing budget crisis. The Governor announced that he would veto any tax increases put forth by the legislature even though the state had lost over \$800 million in funds over the preceding years.

The Cowley Courier-Traveler wrote an editorial about the chaos of the legislative session and their struggles to combat the budget shortfall (Rackaway, 2015). The editorial blamed Brownback's leadership, as well as that of Speaker Ray Merrick. While the legislative session went historically long, they struggled to pass a budget and raised taxes across the board, just not on the income taxes that caused the budget shortfall in the first place.

The Hutchinson News editorial board offered its own budget solution to the states budget crisis (Montgomery, 2015). The editorial urged the governor to roll back the income tax exemption on small businesses and to not increase sales tax or hikes on tobacco and liquor taxes. The editorial board said that an increase on sales taxes would be palatable if it included an exemption for food.

The Topeka Capital-Journal covered Brownback's views on the sales tax increase that was passed by legislature that month, arguing that it wasn't an increase because taxes were still lower overall than they were in 2012 (Shorman, 2015c). *The Topeka Capital-Journal* covered this story with quotes from state legislators who likened Brownback's statements to either outright lies or political blackmail. The article remained critical of the tax cuts saying that

wealthier Kansans were still paying significantly less in taxes while with the sales tax increase the tax burden was now greater on poor Kansans.

In July 2015, Governor Brownback announced \$63 million in spending cuts to the general fund after the end of the legislative session (Hancock, 2015b). These cuts were used to increase the general funds after revenue projections came in short. The state's sales tax was also raised from 6.15 percent to 6.5 percent in July in an attempt to cut down on the deficit.

Additionally, taxes on cigarettes were increased by 50 cents (Lowry, 2015c). The legislature was hopeful that the new tax plan would create revenue for Kansas and fix the \$800-million deficit. *The Kansas City Star* ran an article in late July focusing on a \$17.6 million cut to a state funded program that provided health insurance for uninsured children (Eveld, 2015). *The Star* highlighted that the legislative session ran for a record 114 days and that the legislature left with an understanding that the governor would further reduce funding by \$50 million. The state continued to take extra funds from agencies to put into the general fund, providing a cushion in the budget as a short-term fix.

In early August, *The New York Times Magazine* ran an article titled "The Kansas Experiment" that focused on how Brownback and the Kansas Legislature's policies were damaging the state (Sullentrop, 2015). The focus of the article was how partisan politics, with little to no opposition, affects a state, focusing on the tax revenue shortfall and its consequences. To write the article, Sullentrop shadowed his uncle, Gene Sullentrop, who is a member of the Kansas Legislature, in an attempt to understand the climate of Brownback and the Legislature's agenda during a troubled time in session. The article highlighted lawmakers' efforts to cut school funding and to find a different formula to fund education that wouldn't require giving the schools

more money, which would allow the legislature to push through a bill that cut \$50 million from schools.

In September, Governor Brownback, during an appearance at the Kansas State Fair, failed to address the budget shortfall (Lefler, 2015). *The Hays Daily News* talked to students after the speech who overwhelmingly said that they had wished that Governor Brownback had addressed the budget shortfall instead of asking the students to stay in Kansas when they went to a four-year university.

By October 2015, revenue estimates had fallen short for the fourth consecutive month, resulting in an \$11-million shortfall for the month, and a \$72-million shortfall for the fiscal year (Carpenter, 2015c). The *Topeka Capital-Journal* reported that Brownback was pursuing his core convictions by allowing the state to become crippled by the budget shortfall because he believed the tax cuts would stimulate the economy (Shorman, 2015d). The article outlined the tax cut legislation from the very beginning in 2012 until the time of the article's publication, and how the policy affected the state, even arguing that the tax plan was more aggressive than Brownback had planned. Being told to not expect to see results in the next two to four years, Brownback advocated for the plan saying it would have an immediate positive impact on the Kansas economy, something he still advocated for four years and many spending cuts later.

Governor Brownback stated that he would not be making tax increases or any spending cuts during an interview in October (Hancock, 2015c). The *Lawrence Journal-World* reported that the Brownback administration was working on addressing the budget shortfall, but did not have any specifics to relate as the state lost another \$67 million. The *Topeka Capital-Journal* ran a long article tracing the legislation that produced the tax cuts that had sent the state spiraling into a budget shortfall (Shorman, 2015d). The article said that Brownback signed the tax cuts,

even though they were more aggressive than he wanted them to be and despite being warned that it would cause financial devastation to the state in two to five years. Detailing the crisis the state was in, the article urged Brownback to look at the political reality that he was facing.

In October, the *Kansas City Star* published poll numbers from the annual Fort Hays State University “Kansas Speaks” statewide survey (Kraske, 2015), which found that only 18% of Kansas residents were “very” or “somewhat satisfied” with Governor Brownback’s job performance. Sixty-one percent of poll respondents described Brownback’s tax cuts and policy as a failure, with only seven percent calling it a success. The *Lawrence Journal-World* also published story of the Governor’s low approval rating, noting that other issues polled more on partisan lines, issues including guns on campus and voter fraud (Hancock, 2015). The *Topeka Capital-Journal* also published the poll, saying that while the Governor had such a low approval rating, his office’s spokesperson noted that Brownback had won five state elections, including the most recent one for Governor in 2014, which illustrated that constituents had faith in his policies (Carpenter, 2015c). The newspaper again pointed out the tax policies and budget shortfall in the state of Kansas and how the poll accurately reflected people’s views on the budget shortfall.

The *Cowley Courier-Traveler* published an editorial regarding Brownback’s low poll numbers, asking the state’s Republicans to reconsider their decision to stand with Brownback (Loomis, 2015). The *Lawrence Journal-World* also published an editorial about the disappointing fact that the state was already down \$67 million in the fiscal year, which started in July (“Disappointing,” 2015. p). The editorial pointed out the slowing economy, which was evidenced by Wichita State University’s Center for Economic Development and Business Research and the higher unemployment rate numbers. The editorial noted that Governor

Brownback said to stay the course on the tax cuts and the economy would get better, but the editorial questioned how long the state would have to stay on the current path before the tax cuts brought total ruin.

In October, the *Hutchinson News* editorial board noted that the efficiency expert that was hired to find cuts to make the budget deficit smaller had donated to Brownback's campaign and put in a bid \$1.6 million higher than the lowest bidder (Probst, 2015). The *Garden City Telegram* (2015) ran an editorial during the Kansas Supreme Court's visit to Garden City about the budget shortfall, noting that the governor would rather rein in judges than raise taxes and adequately fund schools ("High court," 2015).

In November, the shortfall was estimated at \$118 million, which prompted Governor Brownback to cut \$50 million to the Kansas State Highway Patrol. The shortfall in November came after sales tax revenue fell short of expectations causing state economists to "[lower] the estimate for sales tax revenue by \$91 million for the year while lowering the estimate for overall revenue by \$159 million" (Lowry, 2015d.).

In November, the *Topeka Capital-Journal* reported that Governor Brownback ordered more funding cuts (Carpenter, 2015f). With the state taking in \$80 million less than expected in the preceding four months, Brownback ordered \$123 million in immediate transfers, cuts, and sweeps to balance the state budget. The revenue estimate put the state \$159 million under expected revenue collections. Most of the cuts targeted the funding of the Department of Transportation. Brownback's Director of the Budget, Shawn Sullivan, emphasized that education would be protected from cuts and said that the deficit was not as bad as it seemed, indicating that with current cuts, the state would be in the black by June of 2016. The article emphasized the timeline of the cuts and quoted Democratic state legislatures decrying the cuts, saying that the

state was in economic shambles.

In December, the *Lawrence Journal-World's* Peter Hancock had a sit-down interview with Governor Brownback, where they discussed taxes and the economy (2015e). Brownback declared that he felt his tax policies were working, citing unemployment going down in November and state revenues starting to rebound. Brownback blamed Kansas's economic troubles on low oil and gas prices, along with bad agricultural revenues and a bad year for the aeronautics industry. Brownback told *the Journal-World* that he believed his tax plan was working but the one thing that worried him was young people leaving the state. Brownback stated that the biggest issue going into the 2016 fiscal year was something that plagued the state in the past: school funding.

Several editorials from other newspapers across the state surfaced at the end of 2015, lambasting Governor Brownback's tax policies that led to the budget shortfall in addition to his inability to fix the crisis. The *Salina Journal* illustrated how the Governor's tax plan wasn't working by comparing Kansas's economy and revenue to that of the surrounding states, ultimately arguing that income tax needed to be raised to end the budget shortfall ("Life," 2015). The *Lawrence Journal-World* called Brownback's tax policy "wishful thinking," pointing out that the Governor called Kansas's budget in good shape, citing the 4.1% unemployment rate as proof that his tax policies were working, while the state was in a \$160 million deficit ("Wishful thinking," 2015). The *Topeka Capital-Journal* editorial board mocked Brownback for saying that the tax policy should not be looked at while raising taxes on food and gas ("Gov. Brownback," 2015).

As will be illustrated in Chapter 2, numerous studies have examined the general role of communications professionals at all levels of government. But the framing strategies associated

with representing the Kansas governor in the midst of a governmental financial crisis in 2015 are especially helpful in illustrating how an unpopular governor sought to cling to ideology and defend unpopular policies in such a situation. Hawley's strategies and their acceptance by key members of the capital media pool help us appreciate how framing strategies are used in government, and how media professionals pursue accurate information in the face of such strategies.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

This study examines the framing strategies used by the administration of former Kansas Governor Sam Brownback to explain controversial policies and views during a state budget crisis in 2015. It was that year when so many of the realities resulting from operating the state government in the face of reduced revenue became evident in the Kansas capital. As previously outlined in Chapter 1, media professionals gifted in managing a politician's messaging and overall image are crucial at all times, and especially in times of crisis. While examination of the communication director's pivotal role is found in many different sources, few studies examine particular local issues and the framing strategies used to influence public perceptions. In fact, the literature most commonly focuses on the more general topic of the role of public relations in government, the role of spokespersons and how framing has created a modern way of communicating policy.

Political Communication and Public Affairs

There is not a consensus on the definition of political communication besides the fact that this brand of messaging serves a political purpose. McNair (2017) defines political communication as purposeful communication about politics. According to McNair, purposeful communication about politics includes all communications by political actors or their surrogates for the purpose of achieving specific objectives, communication addressed to political actors by non-politicians such as voters and the media, and communication about those actors by media outlets. Blumler and Gurevitch (2002) define political communication as the transmission of messages and pressures to and from individuals who are demonstrably unequal, meaning that those who are highly informed and powerful are passing on information to those who are

significantly less informed. Chaffee (1975), has the simplest definition of political communication as the role of communication in the political process.

Toth (2006) describes public affairs as a “specialization of public relations that concerns building public policy relationships between organizations” (pg. 441). In order to be successful in public affairs, organizations have to build public policy relationships through collaboration with other public officials, the media and citizenry. Kaid (2004) describes public affairs as communication on current political events of general interest and concern to the public that provides both information and what that information means.

Public Information in Government

Liu and Horsley (2007) looked to create their own model of a public relations strategy for the public sector. Looking at how the public and private sector of public relations influence each other, they identified eight attributes that would contribute to effective government public information, which includes: politics, focus on serving the public, legal constraints, extreme media and public scrutiny, lack of managerial support for public relations practitioners, poor perception of government communication, lagging professional development, and federalism. Governmental public information faces high levels of media scrutiny. Additionally, public relations practitioners in government can also be faced with restriction in creativity and innovation in developing communication because government officials “do not want to appear to be too far out of the mainstream” (p. 388). Horsley and Liu proposed a wheel of communication that incorporates all eight attributes and how public relations in government can utilize these to become more effective as a communicator.

Grunig (1992) has four public relations models that are a set of values and a pattern of behavior that are used by public relations practitioners. The four models of public relations set by Grunig are the two-way asymmetrical model, two-way symmetrical model, press agency and public information. Turk (1986) examined public relations management styles in state governments in twelve state agencies in Louisiana, and found that Grunig's two-way symmetric model, which is a two way communications system used to communicate with the public that seeks to resolve conflict and promote mutual benefit between the organization and key public stakeholders (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992). Grunig's two-way symmetric model was the model used by public relations in most of the state offices, including the governor's office. The governor's office used the two-way symmetric model because it performs complex tasks and the environment of the governor's office is uncertain and highly constrained.

Crozier (2007) examined the relationships that are developing and changing between political communication and public policy. The focus of political communication has changed. Before, political communication focused on informing and persuading the public. Now political communication professionals are focused on the media, how to manage it, and how to cultivate images and monitor the audiences' sentiments. Government officials acknowledge that to be able to work effectively in the governmental sphere they need professional communication and advocacy management. Crozier (2007) argues for political communications as recursive governance, which is "a form of governance that operates according to a generative informational logic" (p. 2). Public relations is an important part of government to secure public support of policy and to implement political strategies across government agencies and to the public. Political communication is now managed more fluidly with information coming and going constantly between the government and its constituents. There is not one policy focus or

specific target. Political communication is now external and internal: the government reorients its messages among the citizens and uses political consultants or other communications professionals, new information technologies (such as social media), and external advisors to project knowledge and expertise into the public and among themselves.

Political communication changed in the 21st century and the “structures and processes of media development and communications do systematically impact the development of democracy, the legitimization of political power, and the participation in politics” (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004 p. 4). Increases in competition and commercialization in the media have changed political communication. Esser and Pfetsch use comparative political communication research to gain insight into both politics and media communications to look for communication patterns and their consequences. Technology and a wealth of information has changed how political communication is conducted and dispersed. Political communication roles and behaviors are shaped by the specific structures, norms, and values in those political systems.

News reporters have a long history of distrusting public relations practitioners. Spicer (1993) looked at how public relations is defined by the media and if the negative attitudes towards public relations practitioners by journalists is evident in the way they use the term “public relations” or PR. Journalists viewed public relations as a tool of distraction, to soften the look of something negative, or to distract from what is actually going on. Public relations was also viewed as a tool to clean up an organization’s disaster or glaring mistake. Journalists also viewed public relations as a tool for hype, to create artificial excitement over something. While the views of public relations by journalists are diverse, they are mostly negative. In negative stories the spokesperson was found to be less informed and less trustworthily than those in

neutral stories. Putting the title of public relations in front of a spokesperson had them viewed as less trustworthy and credible than that of a spokesperson whose title was different.

The credibility of spokespeople is often viewed negatively by the media. Callison (2001) studied the perceived credibility of spokespeople for organizations, finding that they are typically more visible during negative news, which affects how they are viewed by the public. People with public relations titles were found to be less credible and trustworthy than those without the title of public relations.

Public relations in politics has to do with power and the conflicts of power (Strömback & Kioussis, 2011). Political public relations can be defined as “the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals” (p. 8). A key part in political public relations is a management function, to be able to have the ear of the politicians, and to help develop and understand key policy issues. The political environment in public relations is contentious, which makes it harder to ease conflict. “This makes relationship management both more important and more difficult in political contexts, increasing the stakes involved when selecting key publics and finding strategies to approach active and hostile publics” (p. 19).

Reputation management is an important part of the image of an organization. “How publics view the reputation of a company prior to, during, and after a crisis often plays a pivotal role in how effectively a company responds to and recovers from the crisis” (Turk, Jin, Stewart, Kim, & Hipple, 2012, p. 574). Media reputation is when the media coverage has a form in reputation formation and is an important part of reputation management. The role of a CEO in

reputation management and a crisis response was tested to see what the best combination of reputation, crisis response, and CEO visibility would have on the crisis response. The researchers found that companies using an apologetic response instead of a defensive response during a crisis were viewed more favorably. It was also found that companies with a CEO who was present and visible during a crisis were viewed more favorably than those without. It was found that the best combination during a crisis was with a visible CEO, with a good reputation that used a defensive crisis response. It is important to consider during times of crisis, when communicating to stakeholders, the prior reputation of the company and the options of viable crisis responses.

Sallot, Steinfatt and Salwen (1998) surveyed journalists and public relations practitioners to assess their views on news values and the amount of influence that public relations has on the news. While journalists and public relations practitioners had similar news values, journalists “saw little similarity between their news values and their perceptions of practitioners values” (p. 370). Public relations practitioners perceived “a modest relationship between their news values and that of journalists, accounting for 20% variance” (p. 370). Both groups share similar news values, although journalists are unaware of the similarity. However, journalists did not perceive a greater influence of public relations on the news than public relations practitioners did.

Huckins (1999) did a case study looking at the agendas of the Christian Coalition interest group and major newspapers and how the Christian Coalition tried to set the agenda for the newspapers coverage of them. The Christian Coalition’s agenda was compared to the coverage of the newspapers. After the 1992 presidential election, the Christian Coalition tried to streamline their message and make it more mainstream, relying on less religious imagery, and hiring a new public relations director to make changes to their messages. The direction of the agenda-setting by both the Christian Coalition and the media was looked at as well as the change

in messages and tone by both organizations regarding the coverage and content. Controversial social issues were pushed less by the organization, while mainstream issues like healthcare and education were pushed. After the change in focus, the media perceptions changed from “a political pressure group into a broad social reform movement” (p. 82). The shifts in the Christian Coalition’s agenda were transferred into the media’s depiction of the group’s newly targeted issues.

While so many studies have explored the general roles of press secretaries and their tasks, few have examined the effectiveness of specific issue management from the standpoint of political communicators. Eileen Hawley, and her perceived effectiveness in handling communications during the 2015 budget by media professionals who covered the capital at that time, is examined here.

State Government Public Relations

Public relations’ influence on the news has been examined at the state level. Turk (1986) examined information that was released by public information officers in various departments of the state government in Louisiana to newspapers, and found that public information officers did have an influence on newspaper content. The topics pushed by the public information officers were given more salience in the local newspapers, and while the information was used, it was often used half the time and it was not the major source of information on which journalists relied. Public information officers and their materials were quoted less than half of the time in local newspaper stories.

Press releases from gubernatorial campaigns are an important window into how public relations can influence politics and a politician’s images at the state level. Kiouisis, Mitrook, Wu

and Seltzer (2006) examined the campaigns of incumbent Jeb Bush in the gubernatorial race against Bill McBride in Florida in 2002. Press releases and news stories were analyzed to determine the salience of political issues and the image of candidates during the election season using media messages. The candidates' public relations efforts in setting media issues had an influence on the salience of the issues in the public agenda, although the impact of the news releases was not clear. Bush was more successful by addressing a variety of issues, while McBride came across as a one-issue candidate, focusing mostly on education. It was found that public relations working for Bush was effective at influencing the media by putting their own positive words concerning Bush in their news releases.

Spokesmanship in Government

Spokesmanship in government encompasses many job titles including press secretary, communications director, and public information officer. The Gillette Amendment of 1913 prohibits any government agency from spending money for publicity without the specific approval of the U.S. Congress (Cutlip, Center, & Broom 2000). The intent of the Gillette Amendment was "to prevent incumbent government officials from using their power and positions to influence legislation" (DeSanto, 2001 p. 39). To sidestep the Gillette Amendment, the government used the term "public affairs" instead of public relations.

The Gillette Amendment was created out of the fear that government officials, by using public relations, "could turn public opinion against other governmental agencies" (Taylor & Kent, 2016 p. 2). Amendments were added to the Gillette Amendment in 1972, 1973 and 1974 to further limit the use of government money spent on publicity, propaganda, or legislation influence. While the term, "public relations" is not used in government, the terms "public

affairs,” “press secretaries,” “communications specialists” and other titles are used. Public affairs practitioners operate within the context of the Gillette Amendment and are used to disseminate information and educate the public on issues happening in government.

Spokespeople connect the government to the media. Public administrators, or government officials who have not been elected, also have spokespeople to convey their actions and projects to the news media. Local public information officers spend most of their time “explaining to reporters how policies would work and dealing with the public” (Lee, 2001 p. 111) Part of the job of spokespeople for public administrators is to interact with the media, often speaking with them over the phone or in person three to six times per week. Spokespeople for local agencies felt that they were covered fairly and adequately over 70% of the time and that newspapers gave the most accurate coverage. Lee (2001) found that local spokespeople used media coverage to communicate to other levels of government while federal agencies used media coverage to communicate to interest groups in the legislative body. Spokespeople in local agencies deal with the media frequently, but they are also involved in the day-to-day operations and decision-making.

Framing in Politics

Hertog and McLeod (2001) define framing is a deliberate attempt of an individual or group to structure public discourse in a way that benefits them and helps to achieve their goals. Framing analysis has become a popular way to study politics and media because of the way that arguments and policies are presented to the public. Framing allows for making sense of a certain problem or set of circumstances. When a topic is framed, its context is determined and the way the topic is presented can be defined. Narratives are used in frames to tell the story in a way that

favors the one doing the framing. To be successful at framing analysis, one must be able to identify frames in a certain cultural context and potential frames in the study.

Framing can be used as a strategic action (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). Political actors can use framing as a frame-alignment where they are able to link their frames to some value in a society, influencing others to take the frame and align it with their own values. In politics, this strategy can be used to frame policies and align them with the values of a voting base. The key to framing as a strategic action is to have a political actor not only frame an issue with the media, but also to participate in public deliberation of the issue that allows the issue to achieve potency.

Value framing is used to sway an electorate by framing issues to appeal to voter values (Nelson & Willey, 2001). Value-framing serves as an orienting and motivating factor when used to sway voters. Both politicians and the media use value-framing for issues. Popular value framing is often seen in debates over controversial issues, where the value is either framed as positively or negatively. Value framing can be used to create conflict and split people into an us-vs-them mindset based on strongly held beliefs. This can be an effective way of framing certain issues or policies that either politicians or the media want to focus on and establish a hierarchy of issues among competing values.

Politicians use framing for partisan political gain (Callaghan & Schnell, 2005). For example, framing was used by politicians after the 9/11 attacks in a contested 2002 congressional election. Issues in politics can be complex and multifaceted, but using frames can help a politician persuade audiences. Politicians have constraints on the frames they use, so they focus their frames on the public mood, the partisan composition and organization of interests of the representative's constituency, the historical conflict surrounding an issue, and the level of institutionalization of an issue with the goal of advancing their partisan interests. The public

mood will influence how politicians use frames and what issues they decide to frame. When public mood shifts from the median to one side of the politician spectrum to the other, the framing of partisan issues by politicians becomes more successful.

Framing and Media Coverage

The media has the ability to frame issues from a particular side, but still not necessarily seem biased in their coverage of a particular issue (Tankard, 2001). The media will present political events through a frame to define a situation, identify issues, and set the terms of debates. Framing can define the terms of a debate without the audience realizing that the frame has taken place. This framing can be advantageous for either politicians or the media, depending on which frame is more salient to the audience. The media frames issues by packaging them in a way that is easy to understand for its audience, and often frames issues in a way that is either antagonist and protagonist. Image is an important part of organizations, including corporate and government organizations. Benoit (1997) argued that companies can use public relations for image restoration after a crisis. For an image to be restored, the organization has to be perceived as responsible for an offensive act. Benoit focused on five broad categories that can be used as strategies to repair the image of an organization: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

Trust in the media is a current hot-button topic. Studies show that those who read, watch or listen to main stream news sources, which are news sources that are established, vetted and reliable in the public eye such as CNN or the New York Times. Main stream news sources have more trust and confidence in the media (Jackob, 2010.) Those individuals who seek out alternative news sources, which are news sources that aren't reliable and often not vetted, are

likely to have a lower trust in the media. Kiouisis (2010) found that most people have a skepticism of the media, but that newspapers were the most trusted source of information

Newspapers frequently cover politicians with an average of about fifteen articles per month on an individual representative (Arnold, 2013). Papers very rarely print press releases written by the representatives verbatim or in totality; the press release is sometimes used for a quote or disregarded altogether. However, representatives are placed in prominent places in newspapers, often appearing in the front page or second page of the paper, with the biggest focus being on policy-making.

Journalists frequently frame their stories in predictable ways. In politics, journalists focus on stories in an episodic way, focusing on specific instances and individuals instead of a broader policy issue (Shah, Domke & Wackman, 2001). Politicians often frame their positions in two ways: by ethical values or material values. Journalists will construct their stories on policy based on the ethical frame of an issue, a material frame in regards to economics and pragmatics, or a combination of both. The public will make their judgements on politics based off of the cues provided in the journalist reports. Ethical frames of issues, even if they are framing economic or pragmatic issues, are more likely to influence citizens by framing issues in terms of moral rights and wrongs. Ethical framing puts values front and center, making issues more important to an individual voter by asking them to assign moral value to it, and then it becomes an issue of right and wrong. News frames influence individual interpretation of issues and the voting decisions of those individuals. Politicians also use news frames to influence the electorate and often place value judgment on issues to sway voters into ethical-based voting and policy decisions.

The Internet and social media have proliferated and individualized channels of media (Bennett & Iyengar 2008), creating issues in political communication. Growing distrust of the media is

making political strategic communication campaigns shift the way they campaign and create messaging. Media economics theories have been used to study political communication when it comes to bias and consumers' political preferences. They use those media economics theories to create news content to target consumer segment and look at the impact of media competition on policy outcomes. With the emergence of several channels of media communication and the subsequent fragmentation of the audience "our new political communication models the decline of socially conformist identity processes that formerly defined individuals as message receptors in the group membership society" (p. 716). The polarization of political parties has also created the polarization of media. "People who feel strongly about the correctness of their cause or policy preferences are more likely to seek out information they believe is consistent with their preferences" (p. 720). With the rise of partisan media, which are outlets that focus on a particular point of view or political party, politicians claim bias against the media and curate favor with their own political parties and constituents. Politicians now curate favor with distinct audiences through niche media to push political messaging. Combining online media, such as blogs, social media or online publications, with traditional media is one strategy to keep online presence while still getting targeted messages out. It is nearly impossible to eradicate negative messages on the Internet; instead strategic management and target messages should be the primary tools.

Research Questions

Considering what has been written about governmental spokespersons, the use of public relations tactics in politics and government, the use of framing in the political arena and the role of the press secretary in dealing with media, it is useful to ask the following questions in light of this study:

RQ1: Framing theory predicts that a communications director will present information to the media and the public in such a way as to maintain control of the message and present it in a favorable narrative. How did Hawley use framing to control Governor Brownback's message that schools were adequately funded during the 2015 budget shortfall in the state of Kansas?

RQ2: How did Hawley handle controversy surrounding the budget shortfall and Governor Brownback by using framing and what framing strategies did she use to ameliorate those views?

RQ3: How did media professionals rate Hawley's framing of the 2015 budget shortfall as in her role as Governor Brownback's communications director during 2015, and how did they, in turn, frame their coverage of the state's budget shortfall during that time?

Chapter 3- Methodology

This study seeks to answer the research questions employing the case study method to focus on the 2015 Kansas budget crisis and how the governor's press secretary, Eileen Hawley, framed the issue for reporters and the public. A series of in-depth interviews was conducted with Hawley and four members of the press that regularly interacted with her and covered Kansas state politics during her time as press secretary, and, more specifically, during the 2015 budget crisis. The case study method provides a way of focusing on defined issues and examining the role, tactics and success of communications professionals in executing strategies and extrapolating meaning for future reference and theory building:

Theory developed from case study research is likely to have important strengths like novelty, testability, and empirical validity, which arise from the intimate linkage with empirical evidence. Second, given the strengths of this theory-building approach and its independence from prior literature or past empirical observation, it is particularly well-suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate. (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 548-549)

Qualitative case studies are therefore a good way to use research that is defined more by the object of inquiry than the methods used to conduct the research (Iorio, 2014). Case studies are used to obtain in-depth understanding of a complex phenomenon in relation to itself and a broader context. Case studies can be used in an exploratory manner as a way to begin a larger study, and to gain insights into a particular situation (Bryman, 2003). As previously mentioned, case studies can be used to test theories, with the findings used to parse out the important parts of an exploratory case. The narrative form in interviews allows for a case study to test the waters of where further research should go.

Case studies are thus a useful tool in research “for the preliminary, exploratory stage of a research project, as a basis for the development for the ‘more structured’ tools that are necessary in surveys and experiments” (Rowley, 2002 p. 16). Case studies are used to discover “how” or “why” questions that can set up future research, providing a base for future studies. Case studies are also aid in understanding contemporary events that cannot be replicated, but can be researched through interviews, observation, and documents. A strength of case studies is “the ability to undertake an investigation into a phenomenon in its context” (p. 18).

Case studies often contain some amount of narrative that show the “complexities and contradictions of real life” (Flyvbjerg, 2006 p. 21). Using thick description in the narrative showcases the rigor of the research in a case study. Case studies using interviews can show the intricacies of the research through using the “many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories” (p. 22).

This methodology is widely used in public relations research, with about one-third of research being case studies (Cutler, 2004) used to investigate complex processes and activities that can be difficult to separate from the social context in which they occur. Case studies are used in public relations because there are “often obvious boundaries to public relations practice, and particular phenomenon of interest to scholars are often influenced by the context in which public relations is practiced” (p. 368). Case studies are often used in public relations research because of the issues that are managed in public relations or the unique approach taken in a certain case or by the roles of the practitioners in a certain situation.

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews are a focused conversation between two or more people (Brennen, 2017). Interviewing is used as a type of data collection that focuses on understanding concepts and meaning. Interviews are recorded then transcribed verbatim, without changes to grammar, or the way that the respondents speak during the interview. In analyzing the interview, the researcher should ask follow-up questions and clarify the information if need be. Once the interview transcription is completed, the researcher can thematically identify important concepts, insights and information, usually guided by the research questions. In this regard, focused interviews are used to elicit in-depth responses and identify commonalties that exist between the responders (Iorio, 2014). The goal of focused in-depth interviews is to interpret and uncover shared insights and discern how a group of interviewees understands a problem or a certain topic. Subjective responses can enrich research by revealing the what and how of what the interviewees think of a particular subject. Focused interviews can be conducted as guided conversations or conversations with a particular purpose. The focused in-depth interview can be used to identify budding political issues and to understand an individual's interpretation of highly-publicized or politicized issues. Using interviews with small groups of people is beneficial when they have access to information that the average person does not have.

In-depth interviews can be coded by a single person during research and still have strong reliability (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman & Pedersen, 2013). Three types of reliability exist and are used by a single coder: stability, accuracy and reproducibility. In-depth interviews allow for the participant to engage in active storytelling, which allows the researcher to gain insights not seen through quantitative methods (McCormack, 2004). In-depth interviews can show the complexities of the situation of the participants' experiences.

Representativeness in the findings of an interview can be attained from asking “how” instead of “why” questions (Katz, 2001). Interviews that ask the participant why things happened have the ability to illustrate what happened during a certain event, and provides individualized stories, without the participant trying to analyze their own stories. A small sample size can be a benefit in research as a small sample size can find in depth understanding of social reality in a specific context. Purposeful or purposive sampling is used to make informed judgements on what to observe and who to interview, because it can be critical to understanding some process or concept in a certain situation. A small sample size is useful in projects that study and event of a brief duration or that use hard to find or hard to recruit people as participants (Lindlof & Taylor 2017 p. 109). In this study a small sample size is used due to the limited time period the study examines and the limited pool of people that have expertise on the subject.

Interviewing is important when “one needs to know what a set of people think, or how they interpret an event or series of events, or what they have done or are planning to do” (Aberbach & Rockman 2002 p. 673). Interviews are used in case studies when respondents are selected to help the researcher fill in information or confirm information that is already in place. Semi-structured interviews are useful because they have a more conversational quality and can help the interviewer gain more insights by asking follow-up questions dictated by the flow of conversation. Open-ended questions “provide a greater opportunity for respondents to organize their answers within their own frameworks. This increases the validity of the responses and it is best for the kind of exploratory and in-depth work” (p. 674). Interviews should be tape-recorded to keep the conversational style of the interview and to minimize the loss of information.

Open interviews are used commonly in life history interviews (Silverman, 2006). Researchers conducting open interviews must gain the trust of the interviewee, so that they are able to ask difficult questions. In this type of interview, the researcher and interviewee are active participants and the interview is collaboratively produced. This allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions and take the interview to places that it would not have gone to with a set of established questions. Interviews do not give the researchers facts, instead they give the researchers the interviewee's representations of experiences.

Interviewing seeks in-depth knowledge and is more involved than information gained through other research methods, such as surveys or focus groups (Johnson, 2002). In-depth interviews can be a way to find the meanings of a participant's actions. The best interviews are ones where the informant "can describe a scene or setting or activity, those who can provide thick description...but not necessarily those who analyze or theorize" (Johnson, 2002, 111).

Interviewing is useful when research is done and the researcher needs the observations of others. "Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived" (Weiss, 1994, p. 1). Interviewing can show one's perceptions and how they interpreted those perceptions and relationships. Interviewing provides insights to the research that can not be found in documents or through observation. Thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and interactions can come to light during interviews and can show the social dynamics of the event. Open-ended questions let the respondent add information that the researcher did not know they were looking for and add depth to the research not obtained by other research methods.

Berger (2005) did in-depth interviews with twenty-one public relations executives to try to understand the dominate coalition in public relations and the power struggles and relationships

that go on in the dominant coalition in corporations. Looking at the literature on the dominate coalition and conducting the twenty-one interviews with public relations executives, Berger was able to parse out three forms of power and what it means for the power dynamics within the dominate coalition group: constraints of the power group, for whom it creates opportunities, and how it encourages public relations professionals to do the right thing. Using interviews, Berger was able to find an activist public relations practitioner role in corporate public relations executives.

Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns across a data set in an effort to illuminate themes that emerge (Clarke & Braun, 2013), which show the researcher how the data can then be interpreted (Aronson, 1995). When themes emerge from the data, meaning is derived by the researcher who interprets the context, circumstances, and patterns of those themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Framing Analysis

Framing analysis will be used in this study to look at how Governor Brownback's Communications Director Eileen Hawley and the media that covered the statehouse used frames to discuss the problem of the budget shortfall in 2015. For framing analysis, the researcher must be able to identify frames that were used (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). A preliminary step in discovering frames is for the researcher to be familiar with the context of the issue, how the frames were established, and how they changed over the course of the time frame of the study. Frame boundaries should be built and frame models, similar to the ones that have been found in the research, should be used as models for coding frames. Frames should be linked to groups in

the study to identify re-framing and establish the goals of the framer. A list of symbols, language, usage, categories, narratives, and concepts needs to be established for coding.

Framing analysis in qualitative research necessitates that the researcher has cultural expertise to code the material (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). Frame models should be used to guide the researcher, but not restrain them, allowing for the discovery of new insights in the coding process. Framing differences between groups and the media should be noted. Interviews with primary sources are the best way to discover frames within organizations, and how those frames were established and used.

Coding the Data

After the data was collected through in-depth interviews, the data was coded into categories. The researcher established categories based off of the research questions and framing theory. The codes were: framing, framing from the media, framing from Hawley, media coverage, reaction to media coverage. Codes separate the data and putting the codes into categories help the researcher define and explain the underlying meaning of those elements in the code (Lindlof & Taylor 2017 p. 248). Each interview transcript was read several times and coded off of each research question. The codes were grouped into categories by looking at themes and patterns that appeared in the codes.

This study looks at public relations and media framing during a crisis at the state government level. Interviewees were asked about events in 2015 and interviewed in 2018. While only four reporters participated in this study, it must be noted that only seven reporters cover the Kansas Statehouse on a daily basis, thus meaning that journalists who covered this issue are part of a very limited pool. All reporters who represent print and broadcast media and who regularly

cover the Kansas Capital were contacted and asked to participate although, as explained below, only four newspaper reporters agreed to participate: Tim Carpenter, Bryan Lowry, Martin Hawver and Peter Hancock. Each interview lasted between 120-163 minutes. Eileen Hawley was also interviewed with a separate set of questions. Interviews were transcribed and coded by the researcher. Coding was done by looking for key themes by research question.

The Statehouse Media Pool

The Kansas statehouse is covered by a small pool of reporters, which, according to Hawley, is composed mostly of newspaper reporters. “The truth of it is, if you’re in the statehouse who’s there all the time? The print guys. The TV guys showed up from time to time but it was the print guys who were there all the time in their offices and that’s who you tended to talk to” (Eileen Hawley, personal communication, June 11, 2018). On average seven to eight reporters cover the statehouse daily, from the major newspapers in Kansas, including the *Topeka Capital Journal*, *Kansas City Star*, *Lawrence Journal World*, *Wichita Eagle* and the Associated Press. Television stations WIBW and KSNT in Topeka only cover the statehouse when there are important issues facing the legislature, that cause enough public concern to cover. The public radio station in Lawrence, KANU-FM, which operates KPR, a regional network of public radio stations in northeast Kansas, has one statehouse reporter stationed at the capital to provide daily legislative coverage. The budget shortfall made a huge impact and received much coverage in 2015, when school funding issue became a contentious issue in light of Brownback’s tax cuts.

Hawley led the communications team and worked to disseminate information primarily to this media pool, and it is her relationship with this cadre of professional journalists and her framing of issues relating to the budget crisis that is covered in this case study. Out of the eight

reporters who covered the statehouse on a daily basis, four agreed to be interviewed: Bryan Lowry of the *Kansas City Star*, Tim Carpenter of the *Topeka Capital Journal*, Martin Hawver of *Hawver News* and Peter Hancock of the *Lawrence Journal World*.

Bryan Lowry is the lead political reporter for the *Kansas City Star* and was hired to that position in 2017. Prior to his work at the *Kansas City Star*, Lowry worked at the *Wichita Eagle* from 2014 to 2017 as a political reporter at the statehouse. As a political reporter in Kansas Lowry has covered the careers of Governor Sam Brownback, Representative Mike Pompeo (who is currently the United States Secretary of State) and former Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach. Prior to his work as a political reporter, Lowry was an English teacher for three years.

Tim Carpenter has been the Kansas Statehouse Bureau Chief for the *Topeka Capital Journal* since 2012, and has been with the Topeka Capital Journal since 2004. Prior to his time at the *Topeka Capital Journal*, Carpenter spent almost sixteen years as a reporter with the *Lawrence Journal World*. Carpenter has won several awards for his political coverage at the Kansas Statehouse including six Kansas Press Association Victor Murdock awards, two Journalist of the Year awards from the Kansas City Press Club, and four Burton Marvin News Enterprise Awards from the William Allen White Foundation.

Martin Hawver co-owns *Hawver News* with his wife Vickie. *Hawver News* is an online subscription-only newsletter whose target audience is Kansas legislators and lobbyists. *Hawver News* was founded in 1991. Prior to co-founding *Hawver News*, Martin Hawver spent twenty-five years at the *Topeka Capital Journal* where he covered politics and state government for most of his career.

Peter Hancock has been a reporter at the *Lawrence Journal World* since 2012 where he covers the Kansas Statehouse. Prior to his time working at the *Lawrence Journal World*,

Hancock spent two years at the Director of Public Relations for the Kansas Health Policy Authority and nearly nine years as the Kansas Statehouse Bureau Chief for Kansas Public Radio.

Chapter 4- Results

The results of this study were discovered using thematic analysis to look at comments made during the interviews. The comments were analyzed to see what themes emerged in communication between reporters and Brownback's Communication Office, in the framing of messages from the Communications Office, and in how reporters framed the information in their stories. Framing theory suggests that Eileen Hawley would strategize a way to find positive angles on the budget shortfall and share those angles with the media. Framing theory would also suggest that Hawley would use social media and other forms of communication to deliver positive messages about the budget shortfall and tax bill directly to Kansans. Lastly, framing theory suggests that the media would appropriate some of Hawley's frames in their stories while also using framing of their own to meet reader expectations. Unless otherwise stated, all research in this section was conducted through in-person interviews.

RQ1: Framing theory predicts that a communications director will present information to the media and the public in such a way as to maintain control of the message and present it in a favorable narrative. How did Hawley use framing to control Governor Brownback's message that schools were adequately funded during the 2015 budget shortfall in the state of Kansas?

Hawley used framing to acknowledge the negative effects of the budget shortfall caused by the tax bill, as well as the way Kansans were feeling about it. She then used the data to explain where the tax bill was working. In an email she acknowledged, "You would always try to frame whatever answer came out to match your policy, your talking point on whatever that issue was."

Hawley admitted that she did not intentionally frame any messages, however throughout our interviews, several frames emerged Hawley was the second Communications Director under Brownback, and during her tenure, there were preexisting negative narratives espoused by the media on a regular basis. The most detrimental narrative was that the tax bill was a failure and had caused the budget shortfall. Hawley stated that there was “just no positive angle to the story...from our perspective in the narrative, it’s hard to overcome the negative narrative and a negative narrative is out there that this was a failure so how do you, the minute you have to start explaining why it’s not a failure I think you’ve lost.” Hawley said that instead of explaining why the tax cuts weren’t a failure, she instead acknowledged what people were feeling about the budget shortfall and then told them where they were seeing the tax cuts working. However, the governor’s communications team did not do this with the media. When asked about the budget shortfall or tax cuts, they would have the media do interviews with Sean Sullivan, the Budget Director, or with Nick Jordan in the Revenue Department, feeling that experts on the budget and revenue would give more credibility to the argument.

There was virtually no way to change the narrative that the tax policy was a failure, so Hawley tried to establish credibility by acknowledging the shortfalls of the bill instead, saying that the emotional narrative and argument was already lost, “so our take on it is you dealt with the media the best you could and would pushback aggressively as best you could.” Hawley described the negative narrative of the tax policy as hard to overcome because at the point that she took over as Communications Director, everything that was going wrong in the state was being blamed on the tax policy. Hawley attested to being constantly at odds with the media, saying there was no way to spin the information to make it look good while still retaining credibility, “if you want to be taken seriously you just can’t just go out and spin this and make it

a happy story, I mean no one would've trusted anything we said if we had done that." The Communications Department decided that the best strategy was to be honest about the budget shortfall situation, saying that:

My take on it was you at least need to acknowledge the angst people are feeling, I think if you can say to somebody I understand that maybe you're not feeling the benefit of this policy, let me tell you where it is working, let me tell you what was intended to do in here when we think you will start to feel it, I think one of the mistakes we made was not acknowledging that you know because you had this downturn in the budget and a budget shortfall, people are anxious, people are feeling some angst over this and if you don't acknowledge that from people they stop listening.

Hawley said that the tax cut situation was a complex one, which made it even harder to get the information out, saying that she didn't actively go out and discuss the budget shortfall because no one wanted to talk about it. She asserted that transparency and openness with the media on the complexities on the tax bill and shortfalls was the best way to convey their messages. However, since they didn't have the evidence to change the narrative of the tax policy being a failure, the story continued.

The positive framing in stories from Hawley and the Communications Office came when they met with the national media, especially conservative news outlets such as *Fox News*. Hawley described Brownback as being very popular in Washington D.C. and New York for pushing a conservative Republican agenda. "He was successful in a lot of social aspects like the changes to DCF and abortion, so they loved that on the national level...they're less concerned about the budget because it's not affecting them personally, so he would get a lot of good press

out of state that he never got in the state”. The positive press by national news outlets provided a way for Hawley and the Communications Office to frame Brownback’s policies in a positive conservative light outside of Kansas, bringing praise from Republicans outside of the state.

Although Brownback’s team tried to utilize whatever positive framing they could to boost state opinion, the emotional narrative framing the tax policy was difficult to overcome. The stories about school funding and how it was affecting the children of the state was constant. “It’s about kids and it’s about the future of Kansas, and that is a very strong and compelling emotional argument, and it’s really, really hard to overcome emotions with fact and that’s what we tried to do.” Hawley described not having a story that was as equally compelling as the school funding stories coming from the media, “if you can’t break through the emotional wall no one listens to what you’re saying and we were never successful in my opinion and breaking through that emotional wall, we did not have a sufficiently compelling emotional story to tell to combat the one that was by in large the narrative in the media.” Kansans didn’t care if things were better for someone else if they were worse for them overall.

Hawley portrayed schools as having plenty of money that they did not spend on the classroom, implying that the funding from schools was wasted on a bloated administration and other unnecessary purchases. One instance in particular was to point out a school district in Kansas City that bought a Steinway piano for their students instead of spending that money on books, teachers or other supplies. The consistent frame with school districts was that they wasted money and didn’t provide for the students, although they could have if they managed their funds better.

However, one effective framing device used by Hawley was linking the bottoming out of the oil industry and the agriculture industry with the tax policy, saying that the tax cuts wouldn’t

have affected the state of Kansas if there hadn't been a sharp decline in agriculture and oil prices saying "we would try to link them because it was part of the revenue problem." The communications office linked oil and agriculture to the budget shortfall and declining revenues in an effort to show that there were other factors impacting the budget. Hawley said that this argument was more effective in Wichita and the rural part of the state where oil and agriculture are the main industries where the budget shortfall was framed around those industries and you could speak to the specific audience "but it's tailored for the group that you're talking to and you have to address the concerns each of those demographics is having." The framing in the northeastern part of the state focused on the economic benefit of the tax cuts to small businesses and business growth, due to the difference in industry in that part of the state.

Overall, Hawley's framing consisted of trying to "... just get out and get a simple answer and give an honest answer and stick with it". Small business growth, and the decline in revenues from oil, gas, and agriculture were the main talking points used in Hawley's frames. Social media was used sparingly because she felt it wasn't an effective use of framing and time. The people who followed the governor on social media were usually aligned with his ideals, and Hawley described using social media as yelling into a silo, and "social media that people can go to get their news and tend to go get news that only reinforces what they choose to believe which makes your job even more difficult to do." Occasionally stories would come out that proved the governor's point and Hawley would retweet them to say that they got this one right, and to reinforce the governor's message. As it was impossible to combat the emotional narrative utilized by the media, Hawley used framing to introduce the other factors impacting the budget, tailoring the content of those frames to appeal to the industry prevalent in each area.

RQ2: How did Hawley handle controversy surrounding the budget shortfall and Governor Brownback by using framing and what framing strategies did she use to ameliorate those views?

In an effort to manage the press, ameliorate the views of the governor, and establish credibility, Hawley chose to be honest about the current state of affairs. During her tenure as Brownback's communications director, the negative stories and outlook on the administration were already widespread, making it difficult to create any kind of positive frames. She commented, "...if you wanna be taken seriously you just can't go out and spin this and make it a happy story. I mean no one would've trusted anything we said if we had done that". To establish credibility, Hawley focused on acknowledging the situation of the budget shortfall and illuminating small business growth in the hopes that the media would frame their stories as: the governor knows the budget is bad but is working on creating growth for businesses in the state. Hawley described her framing philosophy as "you would always try to frame whatever answer came out to match your policy, your talking point on whatever that issue was." Hawley said her job was frustrating and difficult but the more open and causal approach with the media worked on occasion:

the only chance you have to get your message out in your words is to just open with it and say hey guys, here's what's going on, here's what I really want to talk about today...occasionally I would see stories that were on the thing that the governor had mentioned and that you know they would ultimately get around to budget questions and they'd get around to shortfall questions, but we would get some of the more positive stories that we wanted with the shortfall stories out as a result of that access and that sort of more informal friendlier approach to doing business with them.

Hawley tried maintaining credibility with the media by being as transparent with them as possible, knowing the subject matter would not come out in the Governor's favor. The media was frequently invited to talk to the budget and revenue directors and interview requests were responded to with sit-downs with subject matter experts. Hawley encouraged talking about where the budget shortfalls were in an attempt to be transparent with the media and in hopes that they would move on to another topic. Hawley said that with the media she would "talk about where our shortfalls are, let's talk about the cuts we're going to make, let's talk about our plan to get out of this." Hawley attested that she couldn't see any other way to go about it with the media because you couldn't make it a positive story no matter how you looked at the angles.

Another strategy Hawley used to reframe the prevailing message of the tax policy's failure with the media was focusing on other the factors impacting the budget. Hawley tied the budget shortfall to the falling oil, gas, and agriculture prices in hopes of showing that there were factors beyond their control that were affecting the budget, not just the tax policy. Hawley said that this narrative worked far better in Wichita and the western parts of the state where people could feel the effects of the oil, gas, and agricultural industries bottoming out. However, this frame was not popular in the northeastern part of the state where education became the major narrative from the media.

Despite Hawley's efforts to balance the negative narrative with positive frames, editorials were tough on Brownback in 2015 over the budget shortfall, and Hawley struggled to get pro-Brownback editorials placed in papers across Kansas. "So if they're getting these highly emotional editorials telling you everything is bad and Sam Brownback is to blame, guess what you're going to start thinking?" Hawley contacted news outlets and editorial boards when Brownback was out in the state doing something to try to get Governor Brownback in front of

the editorial boards so Kansans could get a sense of who Governor Brownback was as a person outside of what they read about him in the paper. Hawley felt that the tone was always negative and that created a cycle of negative stories, “the tone of it was you know was the irresponsible tax policy right, so there would be some pejorative in front of that policy every time, so it was just a general way to blame tax policy for everything that happened whether it was budget cuts whether it was school funding what ever it was, it just became the tax policy is unpopular, the tax policy is bad, the tax policy is hurting you, and that was sort of the constant narrative, that I think we never really got past in the media.” This strategy was ineffective, with news outlets either not talking to Brownback or in doing so would also discuss Brownback’s policy shortcomings along with any positive coverage.

Another strategy Hawley used was to maintain good working relationships with reporters inside the statehouse, since she saw them almost every day. However, Hawley stated that some reporters were easier to work with than others. Hawley clashed with two reporters in particular and said about one that she couldn’t work out any positive framing because, “anytime we do anything with him he is going to look for the negative in it and his paper loves that about him.” Hawley argued that even going to the editor of a paper to discuss working through an obvious reporter bias wouldn’t work because the paper appreciated reporter bias. Saying that political reporters were an interesting breed of reporter to deal with, Hawley focused her attention on reporters that she could work with and whose reporting she felt was fair. Hawley did work with reporters she felt had an obvious bias, but she didn’t actively seek them out to pass on information saying that, “there was clearly nothing in it for me to get in, in the sense that there was nothing for the administration to continue with... to get to a point where I felt like I could have an honest conversation with him. We were never going to get there so I didn’t bother.”

Hawley's work with reporters who she had a good relationship showed some positives, with occasional positive stories about policy or Brownback. However, those reporters who did not have a good relationship with Hawley continued to write negative articles.

In an effort to maintain good relationships with reporters, Hawley used several strategies. The first was creating an environment that wasn't confrontational, "I created a zone of neutrality with them where they didn't come in already pissed off, so if they come in neutral." She kept an open-door policy and M&Ms in her office, which helped reporters feel comfortable to come in and talk to her. Hawley's open access policy would encourage reporters to come in earlier in the week and tell Hawley that they were working on a story about the budget even if they didn't know where it was going yet. Hawley said this was helpful because she was able to develop messaging and frames ahead of time instead of having a reporter come in late on a Friday and say that they needed a quote on a story in an hour. Hawley would also go down to the reporters' offices and just talk to them, sometimes taking the governor with her. Hawley felt that increasing access to herself and the governor allowed reporters to give her the benefit of the doubt on stories and to trust her more. She felt that increased access to her and the governor enabled the statehouse reporters to trust her more.

In addition to increased access, Hawley promoted informal interview sessions with the governor as a way to boost positive press. When Governor Brownback had ten or more minutes of free time, Hawley liked to bring statehouse reporters up to the governor and let them ask whatever questions they wanted for ten minutes. Hawley liked the less formal structure because it was more of a chat than a press conference. Before bringing the media up to the information interviews, Hawley would prep the governor and tell him to be careful, even though it was an informal setting, the reporters would still write about whatever he said. The strategy Hawley

used for these more informal sessions was to have Governor Brownback start off with an opening statement and talk about whatever he really wanted to push that day. The reporters would eventually get around to budget questions, but by doing the informal interviews with an opening statement, Hawley saw an increase in positive stories or the stories that the Brownback administration wanted to get out.

Hawley strove to create a zone of neutrality with the reporters, so they wouldn't come in asking questions and write a story when they were already angry. Hawley said that statehouse reporters generally framed the tax policy as irresponsible, unpopular, and bad, blaming all of the state's problems on the policy. Hawley felt that the constant negative narrative was difficult to counteract, and she counted the few positive stories that they had as wins. The emotional negative narratives from the media were difficult to handle, but Hawley used framing to counter them and ameliorate the views of the governor. Additionally, Hawley strove to establish credibility and good relationships with reporters, increasing both their access to her and the governor himself.

Hawley described her time as Communications Director for Governor Brownback to be frustrating and challenging due to the constant negative narrative surrounding the budget shortfall. Hawley described knowing that there was no good way to contradict the negative narrative perpetuated by the media, because the state didn't have an equally compelling emotional narrative and that "at the time that I was there it felt to me that we were constantly on defense, just answering questions, putting information out, the budget story in general wasn't good, I mean it was constant shortfalls." Hawley said that the situation was created where the tax cuts were blamed for everything, "school funding, it started before Governor Brownback took office, it was suddenly the fault of the tax policy, so you got blamed, you created a situation

where you could be blamed for everything.” In a situation where the administration was being blamed for everything, Hawley used frames to place the blame back on the schools or on plummeting oil and gas valuations. The media often used school funding issues as a frame along with the plight of farmers and the oil industry due to low valuations coupled with low income from a limited crop caused by the drought, Hawley framed those issues as well blaming them for not letting the tax cuts work. Hawley was consistent with her messaging in that her goal was “always to just get out and get a simple answer and give them an honest answer and an answer you can stick with.”

Hawley felt most successful talking to small groups like Rotary and Kiwanis clubs along with various city chambers of commerce. The frame from the communications office that the budget shortfall was “caused by external factors that nobody anticipated, so it was the downturn in ag, the downturn in oil, caused it to become a major shortfall,” carried a lot more weight in western Kansas where Brownback was a known and trusted figure from being on the United States Senate Agriculture Committee for many years while he was in Congress before becoming Governor. The frame of the budget shortfall being caused by the oil and gas industry valuations carried more weight in the western part of the state in part because of the trust they had in Brownback “he was an ally when he was in Congress and the Senate for them, so they trusted him and they believed him and he was doing stuff on preserving the Ogallala aquifer, he was doing stuff with the prairie chickens.”

Another success for Hawley was with the national media. Conservative news outlets like *Fox News* and the *Wall Street Journal* were always willing to talk to Governor Brownback when he was in their area because he was known for implementing conservative values and the narrative of the real-life experiment with tax cuts in Kansas. Hawley said that she wished that

she would have pushed out a lot more of the positive national stories on social media or highlighted them more to show that the local media wasn't the only ones reporting on Brownback and that there were positive things going on in the state. Conversely, Hawley said that social media wasn't a big priority for her because of who she was trying to reach. Hawley often felt that social media was like yelling into a void, and so polarized that the people following Governor Brownback and seeing his social media accounts were either staunch supporters or those who disliked him. Either way, Hawley didn't feel like social media reached out to the population that was lukewarm on Brownback or his policies and could be persuaded to see their framing.

RQ3: What did the media think of Hawley's performance and framing as the communications director during 2015 and how did they frame their coverage of the state's budget shortfall during that time?

All four reporters— Tim Carpenter with the *Topeka Capital Journal*, Martin Hawver with *Hawver News*, Peter Hancock with the *Lawrence Journal World*, and Bryan Lowry with the *Kansas City Star*—stressed that their individual relationships with a people in Hawley's position are the best indicator of that person's job performance. Some reporters had better relationships with Eileen Hawley than others, but all agreed that under difficult circumstances, Hawley was trying to make the best out of a bad situation. The reporters interviewed agreed that it was hard to determine how much Hawley was allowed to do her job and how much of her framing came from the political motivations of others in the governor's office who were dictating the message they wanted to see presented.

Tim Carpenter described his relationship with Hawley as strained and cold. Carpenter described public relations work as incompetent at times, “The governor hated the media coverage, I mean, intensely hated the media coverage, but they sort of had a terrible PR operation. I don’t think they had the skill set to go out there and sell the message.” Reflecting further, Carpenter said, “even if some of those people did know how to do it, I do not think those political people in the governor’s office would let them do their thing.” Often it was difficult for reporters to work out how much the communication office was doing the framing of their messaging and how often it was other political operatives telling them how to frame their message.

Carpenter intimated that his relationship with Hawley was further strained in 2015 when he was working on a story about Jim Brownback, the governor’s brother, which was an expose of the brother’s legal problems and relationship with neighbors. The story reflected badly on the Brownback family, but after Carpenter’s repeated requests for comment, Hawley’s office did not respond. Carpenter viewed this as a breakdown of a relationship and communication. He said that if the communications office would have sat down and agreed to an interview with the governor, he could have explained the story to him and an appropriate comment could have been formulated. Carpenter believed that sitting down with Governor Brownback on the story would have allowed the governor to appeal to Carpenter’s emotions or convince him to change the tone of the story. Instead, Carpenter says they “foolishly didn’t take the opportunity...and they declined to comment but if they would’ve let me sit down for an interview with the governor, I would’ve explained more of the story to him and in a relationship scenario maybe, maybe he could’ve appealed to some instinct of mine...but if you don’t have the conversation, it sure as hell is not going to change the story,” and the governor and communications office were upset

when the story came out. Carpenter said the relationship with Hawley and the communications office further deteriorated when a few days later Hawley went to the *Wichita Eagle* and made a dismissive comment about Carpenter's story, highlighting that Governor Brownback was law abiding and did not cover for his brother.

Carpenter was harsh about his relationship with Hawley and said that having a cordial professional relationship with her could have helped the communications office create a kinder narrative towards Brownback and the budget shortfall. Carpenter said that any attempts by the communications office to frame messages were failures partially because of bad relationships and partially because of the bad political decisions that caused the budget shortfall. Carpenter felt like he was singled out because the administration did not like his coverage saying, "they were trying to make it much harder for me to do my job every time everybody else got a notice about something, I had to call them and email them and ask for the notice and they would send it was just a hassle, they were hassling me." Carpenter posited that the relationship he had with the communications office was combative because he perceived that the office was hostile towards reporters covering the statehouse.

The lack of communication between Hawley and Carpenter caused other minor problems and led Carpenter to perceive that Hawley lacked a basic understanding of how journalism worked. Carpenter described the situation as him asking for comment on a story from Hawley before he posted it online. Hawley didn't respond to Carpenter's request for comment and the following day when Carpenter asked about it, he said that Hawley saw that he already posted the story online and so she didn't comment because the story was already posted. Carpenter said that situations like this showed, "an unbelievable lack of understanding about the online writing system...I think they just had a lack of sophistication and I'll tell you why, part of that was they

were not journalists, they were ideologues”. Not only was there a breakdown of communication, and therefore professional positive regard, Hawley’s lack of understanding of the way online journalism worked further strained an already difficult relationship.

Martin Hawver of *Hawver News* had a different view of Hawley’s performance as Communications Director and said they had a good working relationship. Hawver emphasized Hawley’s relationship building with individual reporters and how she was able to tailor her interactions depending on each reporters interest, saying:

She knew their market, she knew, there were things that you would tell or that would perk up the ears of a *Lawrence Journal World* reporter that wouldn’t perk up the ears of a *Wichita Eagle* reporter, or a Topeka reporter, and she kind of knew the audiences and I guess you’d call that manipulation, but it’s also a job skill and she was actually fairly good at that.

In Hawver’s mind, Hawley was able to understand what individual reporter’s interests were and how to get that reporter hooked on a particular story or frame that would work for them and their audience.

Hawver posited that Hawley understood his readership. As *Hawver News* is a subscription only online news source that tailors its content to lobbyists and lawmakers, Hawley understood his audience and gave him information that would appeal to his core audience that she wouldn’t mention to other reporters whose audience didn’t work in the Kansas Statehouse. Hawley was able to figure out each reporter’s interests by “chat[ting] with people enough to learn their specific little niches that they were going to write for...she understood what people’s interests were, how to get them hooked, how to give them kind of a plot line that would work for

them and their audiences.” In this respect, Hawley understood how to work with reporters and help get them stories that would interest their readership.

Hawver and Hawley had a positive professional relationship with communication extending both ways. For example, Hawver said that when he reported on something, if Hawley didn't think it was accurate, she would tell him what she thought should have been written differently. Consequently, if Hawver thought that Hawley's assessment was correct, he would issue a clarification in *Hawver News*.

Similarly, Peter Hancock, a reporter for the *Lawrence Journal World*, described his relationship with Eileen Hawley as warm and professional. Hancock said that, compared to Hawley's predecessor and replacements, Hawley was a “professional communicator. So I thought that you know, whatever the message was coming out at least it was being delivered professionally, she responded to phone calls, she gave quotes when needed.” One thing Hawley did that garnered Hancock's appreciation was to annotate the State of the State speech and give it to reporters hours ahead of time. The annotations gave sources to whatever information or statistic was in the speech. Hancock found the annotations helpful so that the reporters could write stories quickly and know where the information in the speech came, saving them hours of time looking up everything to see if the source was credible or true.

In general, Hancock reported a good working professional relationship with Hawley, describing her as careful and always wanting to make sure that she was honest and accurate. Hancock said that Hawley would acknowledge if she didn't know the information requested by reporters, and that she was a communications professional; “she wasn't an ideologue.”

Bryan Lowry likewise reported a general goodwill with Hawley. Lowry started his interview by stating that he wouldn't say anything negative about Eileen Hawley; he repeated

throughout the interview that he was hesitant to comment on people personally, wanting to comment on the Brownback administration and their performance on communications as a whole. Lowry commented several times that Hawley was very professional, especially compared to her predecessors. Similarly, Lowry described Hawley's relationships with reporters as professional, always willing to fill their requests, and crediting her experience at NASA as giving her the skills to know how to talk to and handle reporters.

While Hawley and Carpenter's relationship was fraught, Hawley was deemed trustworthy by reporters who knew that she would be truthful in her answers even if her messaging was helpful to Brownback. Reporters felt like they could trust her data and used quotes from Hawley and the governor frequently. However, the messaging from the communications office was not always used by reporters. Carpenter said, "I don't think we are dismissive of their perspective in a news release. I think we sure as hell would've put it in there, not everything they put out is a story." Reporters would pull the quote from a release or ask Hawley for one and refute it in their article if they didn't agree with her messaging. However, reporters and the communications office didn't always agree on what is newsworthy. There would be news releases that were sent out that reporters did not cover and stories that reporters covered that the communications office would not provide comment on because the story was not deemed to be newsworthy.

Although Carpenter believed that Hawley and her office were always behind the narrative, he described one framing device to be both clever and effective. Carpenter said that Hawley and her team were able to "write broad narratives out of a singular fact and went out there and said it over and over again and they did it repeatedly." A few singular facts that the Communications office highlighted were that the oil and agriculture industries' floundering was hurting the economy, that small businesses were moving to and thriving in Kansas, and that

school funding was being wasted on administration and was not being effectively used in the classroom. In summary, Carpenter believed Hawley and her team to be largely ineffective, but credited her with finding a few clever and effective strategies.

Hawver believed that there was a lot of framing coming out of Hawley's office, especially when it came to the budget shortfall of 2015, but knew that framing was part of the job. Hawver said that, "people don't realize sometimes that it is a different culture there that they need to put out the information that they believe the public needs to know that will make them look best." Hawver saw Hawley's framing as necessary; she needed to make Governor Brownback look the best she could while also selling people on the tax cuts that created the budget shortfall.

Hawley's lack of political experience was something that Hawver noticed impacted her ability to be an effective communications director for Governor Brownback. Hawver said that Hawley's lack of political experience wasn't a bad thing, but it made for a different communications style from her predecessors because it was subtler and less confrontational. Hawver said that Hawley's lack of political experience probably made the job harder for her since she had to adjust her communications skill set from working at NASA to being in the political realm saying that, "it made it a little hard for Eileen because she didn't have a lot of political experience, but she wasn't bad at what she did." Hawver said that one of Hawley's main framing strategies was to remind people that "it was the legislature that did all of this (the tax cuts), kind of forgetting that Brownback is the one that pulled the trigger." Hawver said that, while Hawley did her best to push off the blame of the tax cuts on other things like the legislature, and declining oil and gas prices, ultimately it was Brownback who had to own the cuts. However, Hawley did her best to frame those cuts as something that would help Kansas in

the long run. Ultimately, Hawver seemed to have a more positive working relationship with Hawley and a more favorable opinion of her work, even if her lack of political experience may have made her job more difficult.

In addition to being accommodating to reporters, the thing Hancock seemed to appreciate most about Hawley was her honest approach. Hancock called Hawley an “honest broker... she would never say anything that was provably untrue, which I say in contrast to other press secretaries, so I thought she did a very professional job of it.” Being honest carried a lot of weight for Hancock and built trust between himself and Hawley, even when they clashed on the way something was reported. Being a straight shooter with messaging was another thing Hawley did well, admitting that the Kansas economy wasn’t doing well and that the governor had to work on some things, even though the messaging would continue that the tax cuts would eventually work if given time. Hancock said that Hawley framed things in a way that was palatable to Brownback as he was convinced the tax cuts would work, “the message was, at times they would say yeah we admit the Kansas economy isn’t doing really well right now we got to do some things, but they would not let go of the tax cut dogma and that this would eventually work and I think even by the time it was repealed they were still putting out the argument that if you just let it go for a little while longer it would of worked.” Hancock appreciated Hawley’s honesty in saying that the tax cuts weren’t working now, even when she then used messaging that they could work eventually, to back up Governor Brownback’s position on the tax cuts.

In general, Hancock thought that Hawley’s messaging was consistent and fair and was not infused with the governor’s thoughts on morals and religion, which is what you would get when speaking with the governor. Hancock said that, compared to Hawley’s predecessor, (who

would say whatever the governor and the administration told her to, whether it was true or not), Hawley was always honest and didn't lie to reporters to advance the good opinion of Governor Brownback. Hancock viewed Hawley as a professional communicator because of her years at NASA, but like other reporters, said that her lack of political communication experience might have hampered her political messaging. However, Hancock said that he could sense that Hawley wasn't a direct participant in politics; she was just a conduit for the message especially on the school funding issue where Hancock felt that the message "wasn't credible, and I don't think it was Eileen's fault, I think it is the fault of the governor who refused to admit that he made a mistake or that he was wrong."

Although Hancock viewed Hawley's communication as fair and consistent, she was not always on good terms with all the major newspapers. Hawley was able to represent the administration's position on issues with a calm and collected demeanor, affording her a level of professional and mutual respect from the reporters, but she did have difficult relationships with the *Kansas City Star* and the *Topeka Capital Journal*. Hancock said that the animosity between Hawley and the two newspapers was that the two papers were constantly on attack mode and thought that Hawley wasn't giving them the full story, was hiding something, or wasn't telling them what they wanted to hear.

While describing Hawley as respectful and generally good to work with, Lowry said that not all of the framing and messaging decisions came from Hawley. Lowry described Brownback's confidants as having more say over policy and messaging decisions, "the governor had his confidants who helped advise him and they certainly had a role in determining what messaging came out of there so there were a lot of people, not just Eileen who had that role," although Lowry noted that Hawley was exclusively the one dealing with the media and

delivering the messages from the administration. The message being delivered was that Brownback believed that the tax cuts had no role in creating the budget shortfall and that the media was exaggerating the impact the budget shortfall was having in Kansas.

Overall, although the communication from the Brownback administration failed to be convincing, Hancock believed that it wasn't Hawley's fault, but rather that the administration was putting out policies that were hard to defend. Hawley's lack of political experience made her a communication director that most of the reporters liked because she was not confrontational and did not attack the reporters' messaging like previous communications directors had done. Hancock said that people didn't buy the messaging except for those who bought it for purely ideological reasons. Hancock said that Hawley did the best framing that she could with a governor who refused to change the frame, "she kept her cool, would acknowledge the numbers were not going in their direction but stood up and said this is our policy, this is what we're going to do, so you could agree with her or disagree with her but you couldn't argue that she wasn't handling her job and doing what she was supposed to do." Hancock said that in the end, the polling showed that the messaging coming from the communications office just wasn't convincing people that the tax cuts were working.

Although there was some semi-effective messaging generated in the governor's favor, it was full of errors and Hawley chose to have nothing to do with it, which secured reporters' trust. Hancock said that he didn't feel all of the messaging was coming from Hawley, but that a lot of it was coming from special interest groups who had an ideological message to push out. For example, Hancock thought that the messaging about wasteful spending from schools wasn't coming from Hawley, but rather from other special interest and allied groups such as the Kansas

Policy Institute. The Institute contended that schools had plenty of money, but were spending it poorly, arguing that if you counted the money in a particular way, schools were getting funding increases. Hancock felt that, “there was a counter messaging going on out there but it wasn’t necessarily coming out of the governor’s office.” Hancock said that although there was a semi-effective ‘push-back machine’ that was messaging the governor’s points, it was outside of the communications office and coming from other quarters. Hancock asserted that Hawley didn’t push any of the points that were somewhat effective as pushback, because there was a lot of falsehoods or creative economics going on in that messaging. Hawley didn’t push back on the negative messaging without having concrete proof, and was therefore able to keep her trust with reporters, so that they knew the information coming from her was credible.

Another aspect that Hancock appreciated about Hawley was that she gave reporters more access to Brownback. The governor would frequently wander the halls or talk to reporters without having a formal press conference. Hancock said that he personally had more direct access to Brownback during Hawley’s tenure as communications director saying that he had more “access to him directly, personally, actually it was one of the funny things about Brownback was he would occasionally just go walking around the statehouse talking to people...he just came down to the media suite and sat down in John Hanna’s office with the door open and we’re all sitting there just kind of chit chatting, and it wasn’t an on the record type of thing, just a conversation.” Hancock said Hawley made Brownback more personally accessible to the media. The casual access to Brownback stopped after Hawley left.

From a strict job performance standpoint, Lowry described the job of Communications Director for the Governor as the person who relays the governor’s thoughts accurately. In this case, Hawley did a great job stating and defending Governor Brownback’s policies the way he

wanted them to be presented. Lowry's main criticism of Hawley's job performance was that the communication's office was too reactive, where Hawley and the Communications office wouldn't be proactive in communicating with reporters whereas those in the legislature would be more willing to go to the media. Lowry said that Hawley would hardly ever go to reporters with information, instead letting them come to her with requests or questions. Lowry viewed the reactivity as the biggest failure of the communications office, letting others get ahead of the messaging. Lowry viewed Hawley and the communications office as being extremely accurate in representing Governor Brownback's viewpoints and framing of his thoughts and messages.

Reporters interviewed claimed to be able to see the frames that Hawley presented, but claimed that they did not frame their stories, or that they did very limited framing based off of what their subscribers wanted to read. However, several frames emerged as the statehouse reporters described how they wrote stories on the budget shortfall. Much of the reporting focused on school funding and LLCs getting tax breaks over individuals.

Tim Carpenter focused on the budget shortfall and how it would affect school funding, saying that "a lot of the time pushing the dollar signs would have been in public education." Carpenter thought that the framing that Hawley and the communications office used was ineffective because though the governor's office had a lot of control over the budget, they tried to focus on how the schools were wasting money, even though Brownback was actually cutting school budgets. Tim Carpenter said that the goal of the *Topeka Capital Journal* and his reporting was to write stories for "the public interest and that the budget sure as hell was." Budget stories in the *Topeka Capital Journal* were numerous, looking at frames for different ways they could report the budget shortfall such as through the school funding fight.

In fact, Carpenter viewed a lot of the frames coming out of the communications office as ineffective because Governor Brownback was unwilling to admit that he had made a mistake with the budget cuts, instead blaming the budget shortfall on others or on external factors explaining that “I think the messaging, the big messaging problem which this leads to that and for the governor was viewed it as weakness, as an extreme weakness to ever admit that you made a mistake.” Carpenter focused on the rigidness of the message and called it “massive spin doctoring, because you know they had this really risky tax policy in 2012 that was burying the state government and they never, as I said, never wanted to concede that maybe part of that was a bad idea and so they would always spin doctor the news releases to say it was a raging success, but where is the evidence?” Along with the inability to admit fault to any of the budget shortfall, Carpenter said that Brownback and the communications office framed the tax cuts as a great success without any evidence. Anecdotal evidence was provided to illustrate the tax cut success: LLCs having lower taxes and that there were positive growth trends in the state, but those trends were only present in the northeastern part in Johnson County. Carpenter believed that no evidence was released on the actual beneficiaries of the tax cuts because he believed the evidence would reveal that Koch Industries benefitted the most. This information would not have been favorably received by Kansans.

Carpenter did not, however, believe that the framing coming from the governor’s office was formulated by Eileen Hawley and the communications office. Instead, Carpenter believed that the framing of the budget shortfall was dictated by the Chief of Staff or others in Brownback’s office. This, Carpenter believed, hampered Hawley and her office from effectively framing messages along with the fact that Brownback disliked the media, “he intensely hated the media coverage, but they sort of had a terrible PR operation, I don’t think they had the skill set to

go out there and sell a message...and even if some of those people did know how to do it I do not think those political people in the governor's office would let them do their thing.” Carpenter said that the frames didn't line up with the facts and that caused dissonance between the reporting and the messaging from the communications office. Carpenter said it was easy to circumvent framing from Hawley and the communications office because they could always find several people who had a different opinion or said the complete opposite of the messaging from Hawley. With framing coming from Hawley and others, Carpenter was able to find frames from the opposition as well to counteract them and insert into his reporting.

A frequent framing tactic Carpenter used in his reporting was employing the voice of a ‘real person.’ He did this to emphasize the stories of people who come to testify in front of politicians and state their case for a piece of legislation saying, “when I go to hearings there's a lot of people there to testify, I love, I will emphasize, I called them real human beings, not lobbyists, not politicians, not legislators, but real people show up to state their case and I will emphasize those people in the stories, those are real people, real Kansans.” Carpenter said that the real people had powerful stories that resonated with his readers. Using this tactic Carpenter would frame his reporting with what he liked to call a real person to transport his reader into the shoes of someone like themselves, who had no political experience, but who was keeping an eye on, and had an opinion about, the political climate in Kansas. Carpenter's goals were to report in the broadest terms and to make the reader connect with what he was reporting. Carpenter said that he wanted to report on what applies and affects everyone, touching people's lives with what he was reporting. The biggest thing he focused on was the income tax, saying that everyone but LLCs paid them, and he always kept that fact in the back of his mind while reporting. Keeping this in mind Carpenter would report on how businesses would reorganize into LLCs to get the

tax breaks, and how those tax breaks didn't amount to anything significant such as hiring new staff.

Another framing tactic Carpenter used was the governor's mismanagement of funds as a result of the bad tax policy. Although, everyone could agree that oil and gas valuations dropping was one thing affecting the economy and the budget shortfall, Carpenter disagreed with Brownback and the communications office on how much of an effect these factors had on the economy. Hawley framed her messaging around oil and gas valuations having a large effect, and impacting most industries in Kansas; Carpenter disagreed and framed his stories around bad tax policy and a mismanagement of funds by the governor.

Kansas being called a "great experiment" in regards to its tax policy by Governor Brownback was another frame that had to be worked with by the communications office. Carpenter believed that as soon as Brownback uttered that phrase that he owned that tax policy and couldn't say a bad word against it, lest the experiment fail. Carpenter noticed that phrase was used less and less often, especially in 2015, as it was becoming clear that the tax cuts and policy surrounding them were a failure and sinking the state into debt. Carpenter noticed that Hawley and the communications office would pull singular facts, such as Kansas had the most economic growth in a certain month and write broad narratives about that singular fact, and repeat them to make the tax policy look like it was working, "they were brilliant, that's one thing that they use, they took simple square facts and wrote robust narratives about them that were not accurate." Carpenter said that the *Topeka Capital Journal* started a fact meter in the paper when the communications office started to take simple facts and write robust positive narratives about the fact, focusing on the one good thing and pointing to it repeatedly, trying to push all the negative facts in the background. Carpenter did a story annually about the positive metrics and facts that

were pushed out by the communication's office and noticed that sometimes a few metrics would improve, but more often than not, they didn't.

Martin Hawver had a different perspective on Hawley's framing. Firstly, Hawver writes more for a niche audience of lobbyists and politicians in the state, rather than for the general public with his subscription only newsletter. Hawver noticed that Hawley used frames based on what Governor Brownback wanted and tried to make them work for a general audience. In addition, Hawver noticed that Hawley was adept at pitching stories to reporters by knowing what the reporter's interests were and how to get them hooked on a frame that would work for them and their audience. Hawver noted Hawley had a skill in telling reporters information that would appeal to their subscribers. In his case, Hawley gave information that would appeal to the lobbyists he wrote for. Hawver described Hawley and the communications office as good at diverting ugly decisions in terms of the budget onto the legislature. Hawley would put out a statement on behalf of Brownback saying that "everyone else (the legislature) has to think up something and then the governor will choose, you know they got real good at diverting that, those really ugly decisions onto the legislature." Hawver noticed that Hawley and the communications office were good at getting little wins into the media and making them sound better than they were. The little wins consisted of small costs savings that sound large to the average citizen, like \$4 million in a fund. Overall, Hawver recognized that Hawley used framing to highlight the positive elements of difficult and complex situations.

Another framing tactic Hawver noticed Hawley and her team employing revolved around classroom funding. When the budget shortfall spurred the school funding issue in 2015, Hawver saw frames coming from Hawley and the communications office talking about economy in the classroom, making it sound like more money should be spent in the classroom, "they were just

talking about economy, more money in the classroom, they always like to talk about that, the, no real good definition here, but money in the classroom, that sounds like what everyone wants.” She therefore argued that the block grant funding would make the situation better, even though the grant was enacted to cut funding and help the budget shortfall.

Hawver was able to discern the framing tactics Hawley was using and deconstruct them to appeal to his audience. Hawver believed that the purpose of Hawley’s position as communications director was to tell the media what they should be telling the public and that with Hawley and the communications office, “sometimes that it is a different culture there and that they need to put out the information that they believe the public needs to know that will make them look best... you talk the budget, we keep the schools open, we keep the highway patrol on the roads...but when you’re going to do that stuff you spin it and take credit for it.” Hawver in turn would write what would be of interest to his audience and would try to deconstruct Hawley’s frames by telling his lobbyist audience if what was going on in the statehouse was going to amount to anything that would affect them. Hawver described seeing trends in the information coming from the communications office, although long-term planning for stories was difficult because his focus had to be on whatever the big story of the day was, whether that was the school funding issue, the short staffing at prisons, revenue estimates being lower than expected or any other number of things that was affecting the state because of the budget shortfall.

Hawver noticed that a consistent message coming from Hawley and the communications office was that the tax cuts that caused the shortfall could work, if circumstances or other factors were different. Hawver noted that in his reporting he focused on the economy often, “the emotion went with the economy, the recession, farm prices are down... oil prices were going

down.” Hawver framed his coverage towards lobbyists and statehouse workers, often discussing how the information coming out of the statehouse would be most useful to them. Hawver focused on bills and information that he thought lobbyists could effectively use, which means he didn’t focus on what traditional papers would focus on, like how the block grant school funding would affect children’s learning. Instead, Hawver gave lobbyists information on how they could use the block grant funding decision for schools.

Another frame was using real people’s stories to make a political topic resonate. During a medical marijuana hearing in 2015, parents brought their sick children to the hearing, where some of the children had muscular problems or seizures. That hearing was used to help broaden the scope of how medical marijuana is viewed by legislators in Kansas, and where lobbyists for medical marijuana can use their influence to expand the discussion on medical marijuana. Hawver said that this tactic and framing was able to get a medical marijuana hearing into a republican controlled Kansas for the first time, “it’s interesting how they sold it... you know it was a pretty ugly hearing...when they talk about medical marijuana they’ve kind of broadened it from helping the little children that everyone wants to help.” This framing tactic of using real people’s stories was a popular one for reporters, and used to help their readers connect with other people on legislative topics instead of just reporting facts.

Hawver used his newsletter to frame how people talk about issues in the statehouse and how they will shake out politically. Hawver wrote on how the decisions being made at the state level would affect voters. Overall, Hawver noted that his writing and framing was radically different from a traditional newspaper because the culture of those who worked in the statehouse is different from average Kansans. The issues important to legislators and lobbyists and those that are important to average Kansans are completely different because of the varying views and

political ideology of each person, while legislators want to get reelected and advance policies to do so. Legislators and lobbyists are working within an inherently political realm while average Kansans are concerned with how their daily lives will be affected.

Although Hawver admitted that Hawley and the communications office spun their messages, he said that that was Hawley's job and she was adept at it, although, "it was a little hard for Eileen because she didn't have a lot of political experience, but she wasn't bad at what she did." Hawley put out the information she believed the public needed to know while making Governor Brownback look good saying that Hawley, "had a pretty good skill set in dealing with individual reporters, she knew their market, she knew there were things you would tell or that would per up the ears of a *Lawrence Journal World* reporter that wouldn't pick up the ears of a *Wichita Eagle* reporter." Hawver said that he combated this tactic by describing what he believed the spin was, and who it was supposed to appeal to. Hawver described that the goal of public relations is doing whatever is needed to get a story out. Hawver felt that Hawley did a great job with focusing her pitches to a reporters audiences and creating messages that could help Brownback's image. Although the message on the budget shortfall was ineffective, Hawver said that it wasn't Hawley's fault, but that she did the best she could to defend a bad policy by trying to pawn it off on the legislature.

Similarly, Peter Hancock saw the same frames that the other reporters observed coming from Hawley: the budget shortfall, which the tax cuts were a "shot of adrenaline into the heart of the Kansas economy," and that oil and gas valuations declining was the real reason behind the budget shortfall. Hancock recalled that Hawley was consistent with the messaging about the budget shortfall being caused by external factors and not the tax cuts, and that she was effective in getting the message out.

In regards to Hawley's framing, the most persistent messaging Hancock observed was that if given time, the tax cuts would work, the economy would turn around, and the budget shortfall would go away, but little evidence was provided to assure these claims. Hancock described the framing as consistent, "so they stuck to their guns and they kept saying it was the oil and gas industry and the ag industry which they didn't see coming." Although Hawley claimed that a record number of small businesses were being formed, the state would not corroborate those claims by releasing any data, "there was this message about new corporate filings or new business entity creations and some weird statistics about cross migration between the Kansas/Missouri border war... and they would use that as evidence that it was working." The numbers were based on confidential tax data that was not released and had no similar previous data for comparison. The message from Hawley emerged that there was a record number of new corporate filings and new business entity creations with little statistics to back it up. Hancock said that the only numbers-based evidence he could see that backed up Hawley's messaging was in northeast Kansas in the Johnson County area, which was growing anyways.

Hancock could see Hawley's frames of the budget shortfall not being caused by the tax cuts, although the frames were ineffective, saying "they put something out that you presented, you know, this is what they're saying in response to all these events, but here's all the evidence to the contrary, I think in the end the polling results showed that the message wasn't convincing people." Additionally, Hancock appreciated that Hawley delivered them in a professional manner, and acknowledging that the numbers were not going in the direction that Governor Brownback wanted them to. Hancock said that while the budget shortfall and economy were often reported together or talked about like they were the same, he didn't necessarily see the relationship between the two, describing them as two separate issues to overcome. Hancock

would draw a direct correlation in his reporting between the tax cuts and the budget crisis and report on the economy separately, pointing out that the tax cuts were tanking the Kansas economy while the national economy was getting better. Hancock described his reporting as focusing on the tax cuts and budget shortfall separately from the economy, even though they were often lumped together in the broader narrative, “I would draw a direct correlation between the tax cuts and the budget crisis and separately I would write about what is going on in the economy, and you could point out that the tax cuts were premised on promise, something else would be happening over here and clearly isn’t, so you know, that’s how I handled it.” Hancock pointed out that oil and gas valuations were such a small sliver of the economy and that those valuations dropping off wasn’t affecting the economy and having the big ripple effect that Hawley and Brownback said it was.

Hancock posited that the messaging from Hawley and the communications office failed, but Hancock didn’t blame the failure of the messaging on Hawley. Instead, he said she did a good job with the bad situation she had to deal with, but that the messaging wasn’t credible because Governor Brownback refused to admit that he made a mistake and that the tax cuts weren’t working, “she would give an answer that she was trying to represent the administrations position on something...the messaging from the administration fell flat on it’s face, people just didn’t buy it, except for the people who bought it for ideological reasons.” Hancock described the messaging around the tax cuts as being hopeful because they were said to eventually help Kansas families. However, when they didn’t help and the budget shortfall grew worse, people became disillusioned, and the messaging became more ineffective. The constant bad reports for the revenue shortfalls and economic reports created a glut of news for statehouse reporters, which kept Hawley busy creating optimistic messaging. Hancock described taking this

information and framing his reports as straight on, telling his readers what was going on without framing it from the perspective of how the information affected one person personally.

One way Hancock overcame Hawley's framing was to quote her or Brownback and then to simply show evidence to the contrary. Framing was something that Hancock paid attention to, and wanted to highlight in his reporting, noticing that the frame pushed out by Hawley and the communications office was always that the governor didn't see the drop in oil, gas, and agriculture valuations coming, and that the budget shortfall was the result of that and not the tax cuts, "it was an interesting time because the governor had labeled this a real life experiment and so you're reporting on the results of the experiment going on...and I don't think it was Eileen's fault, I think it was the fault of the governor who refused to admit that he made a mistake or that he was wrong." The other frame that was constantly used by Hawley was that the tax cuts would work if given time and if other external economic factors hadn't happened. Hancock said he counteracted this message in his reporting by quoting Hawley and then pointing out evidence to the contrary about the tax cuts. For example, Hancock noticed that Brownback and Hawley would often claim that the tax cuts were bringing in new businesses and that the economy was showing signs that the tax cuts were working. Hancock would quote Hawley or Brownback and then point out evidence to the contrary in his articles, indicating that his readers were not convinced by Hawley's messaging. He pointed to Brownback's poll numbers as proof that Hawley's frames were not working.

Though Hawley focused much of her framing on the tax cut policy, Hancock framed most of his stories on school funding issues, "things that are important to Lawrence... Lawrence is a company town like Manhattan is to some extent so the higher education budget is a big deal." As a reporter for the *Lawrence Journal World*, school funding stories resonated the most

with people because the University of Kansas has a significant impact in the area. The *Lawrence Journal World* reported heavily on the school board and cuts to K-12 schools and higher education. With education affecting most of the population in Lawrence, Hancock would frame his budget shortfall stories with the inclusion on how schools would be affected.

Additionally, when Hancock reported on budget cuts, he would focus on how the cuts were affecting higher education. “Sometimes, it’s like drinking out of a firehose,” Hancock said about the number of budget stories that would have to be covered on a daily basis. Hancock believed that most of the messaging about school funding in regards to the budget shortfall and tax cuts were not coming from Eileen Hawley. Hancock believed that the frames about school funding came from other, outside entities with influence in Brownback’s office (such as the Kansas Policy Institute or American’s for Prosperity), “I think they want to gift, to appear that there were not coordinated messages, when clearly they were, or they were just supportive messages from political allies,” and that those frames were pushed onto the communications office from Brownback’s political allies. Hancock believed that the governor’s office and Hawley would echo these messages, but not be the primary messengers. Hancock focused on the higher education frame in his stories and how the budget shortfall and tax cuts were impacting higher education. Additionally, Hancock said that Lawrence is a company town with the University of Kansas being the largest employer, which caused him to cover all of the Board of Regents meetings. Higher education was the driving focus and frame in most of his budget stories, with that impacting the most readers.

Hancock noticed that the media at large used Brownback’s claim that the tax cuts were a real life experiment as a way to discredit him in 2015, to the point where it was getting national attention. Hawley and the communications office didn’t use the term “real life experiment,” and

Hancock noticed that this frame was being used by the media and not Hawley or Brownback.

Hancock was most surprised by the attention that the tax cuts and budget shortfall was getting around this time, with the national media and with the constant attention by Kansas media.

Hancock framed his stories about the budget shortfall through stories on how the tax cuts affected education, especially since it is the primary employer of the readers of the *Lawrence Journal World*. Hancock was able to see the frames that Hawley was presenting on the lower oil and gas valuations affecting the states revenue, although he didn't buy into the frame.

Lowry was able to recognize framing strategies utilized by Hawley and her communication staff, and the place he seemed to notice the most unfiltered frames was on social media. However, the social media frames merely served to cater to the audience who already supported Brownback's views. Lowry described social media for the Governor being the place with the most noticeable framing since it wasn't being fact checked by the media.

While Hawley was accurately representing Governor Brownback's views, Lowry believed the framing by Hawley and the communications office to be limited by Governor Brownback's insistence that the tax cuts were working and did not cause the budget shortfall and that "the administration certainly framed it as though this was less of a crisis that I think it probably was, that because tougher to do because the lawmakers were pretty open about it and just the numbers were pretty clear cut." Lowry reiterated that the communications office was reactive and that the framing of messages was not necessarily done by Hawley, and instead was sometimes put in place by Brownback's confidants, and other staff, "I think there were a number of people, not just the governor who had influence over what the messaging was in that office and I don't think it was just Eileen...they were certainly getting messaging not just from the governor but also from a wider apparatus of people both within the government and outside the

government who had some say in what the messaging was going to be.” Governor Brownback did not view the budget shortfall as a crisis and posited that the tax cuts didn’t have a role in creating the budget shortfall. Brownback’s stance meant that Hawley had to frame the Governor’s messages in a way that conveyed that the tax cuts weren’t to blame for the budget shortfall, “Brownback was always very convinced that the experiment was working, so I think that’s a really a key thing is what Eileen’s job to do was to relay what the governor’s thoughts were and I think she was relying his thoughts accurately, it’s just you can debate whether or not the governor’s framing of the budget crisis was accurate.” Out of this necessity was born the frame that the devaluation oil and gas created the budget shortfall and not the tax cuts.

Lowry discerned another of Hawley’s framing strategies, and although he deemed it effective, he believed it to be misleading. Hawley highlighted the job growth in Kansas, citing numbers that said there were twelve hundred jobs created in a month to make them look positive, Lowry described “their framing of the national economy was much worse than it was to allow the Kansas budget situation to seem not as bad as it was and some of them early, when there was slightly positive economic news the idea that it was due to anything other than the Brownback tax cuts was not even considered an option.” Lowry described the positive framing of job growth as misleading, because it focused on only new jobs coming to the state and not the net job growth, ignoring jobs leaving the state.

According to Lowry, 2015 was the year that framing became more difficult for Hawley because there was an actual budget shortfall and not just projections and estimates of a looming shortfall. Lowry described that, in regards to the budget shortfall in 2015, it was much harder, “it became a lot less easy for the governor’s office to control the narrative, or to frame things or even for it to be framed as kind of like well conservatives say this will happen and democrats say

this will happen,” because there was now clear data on what was happening and the debate had moved to what to do about the shortfall instead of speculating on if a shortfall would happen due to revenue estimates. Hawley then shifted her focus to trying to illustrate how the national economy was worse than it actually was to ameliorate the perception of the budget shortfall crisis in Kansas, which Lowry viewed as Hawley using framing to support the governor’s views, “their job was to relay the governor’s view and his view was that there wasn’t a crisis, and you know when the governor had to, he realized obviously that things had to be done at a certain point, but he was the only one to not acknowledge that his tax plan had a role in creating the problems.” Hawley lumped the shortfall into a national discussion and linked it to a slow recovery from the great recession. Lowry said it was harder for Hawley to claim that the budget shortfall was not caused by tax cuts because now legislators on both sides and independent groups had data to criticize the Brownback tax plan. Lowry said he knew that Brownback was losing control of the narrative when the Tax Foundation, a conservative leaning economic group, was criticizing Brownback’s tax plan. With conservatives and democrats criticizing the tax cuts, and Brownback not admitting that the tax cuts were hurting Kansas and creating the budget shortfall, Hawley was stuck in a difficult situation to create framing that would support the Governor’s message.

Bryan Lowry claimed that he didn’t frame his reporting in any way, instead focusing on what the actual impact was to his readers. He claimed that he tried to illuminate what would happen if a certain cut were made to the budget, (which is framing his stories to highlight the impact on his readers and on the average Kansan), saying that “there became this idea that they (Governor Brownback’s administration) seemed to think that the media was exaggerating it but we weren’t, we were just, we were reporting it very matter of factly.” Although, school funding

and cuts to school budgets as well as the block grant funding bill were stories that were covered often, Lowry claimed that school funding wasn't a frame that he presented to his readers and that, "it's not necessarily the reporters who are framing it that way, that's what the larger public is interested in and that's what the lawmakers focus on because it's the biggest budget item in the Kansas state budget so of course they're going to talk about schools." He argued that it was a frame presented by the legislators because that is what the larger public was interested in, in regards to the state budget. However, Lowry believed that K-12 schools had a better cushion than other items in the budget and that cuts to them didn't matter as much because they were protected by a constitutional amendment. Lowry said he focused more on other budget items that weren't protected and were cut deeply because of it, such as higher education, and the highway funds.

Lowry viewed Hawley's framing as trying to make the budget shortfall seem less bad, and pushed the blame onto other things such as low oil and gas valuations or the national economy. Lowry did appreciate that Hawley, "knew how to talk to reporters and handle reporters, but I think there was a difference where she wasn't necessarily as partisan as some of the other people in the administration and certainly not as partisan as the people that they switched to then after her," and that Hawley's lack of partisanship may have hindered her job performance. Lowry framed his stories with what he felt the budget shortfall did to impact his readers, such as cuts to higher education and highway funding.

The media interviewed described being able to see Hawley's frames about the budget shortfall, with her emphasis on low oil and gas valuations making the budget shortfall worse and that schools were adequately funded, and not putting their money in the classroom. The media tended to frame their stories on how the tax cuts were impacting their readers. For Hancock, that

was focusing on education, for others it was focusing on LLC's and economic growth as well as the cuts to education.

Chapter 5- Discussion

Framing theory suggests that Eileen Hawley would strategize to find positive angles on the budget shortfall story and share those with the media. Framing theory would also suggest that Hawley would use social media and other forms of communication to deliver positive messages about the budget shortfall and tax bill directly to Kansans. Lastly, framing theory would suggest that the media would use some of Hawley's frames in their story's while also using framing of their own to appeal to what the majority of their readers were expecting. In actuality, as presented in the data cited here, Hawley established trust with the media, as capitol reporters cited here generally felt that they could trust the information that she was providing over that of others in the Brownback administration. This would suggest that the reporters would have a more positive frame when Hawley was used as a resource of information for a story on the budget shortfall. However, even while reporters trusted Hawley, her frames did not result in positive frames in reporter's stories.

Hawley and statehouse reporters both described here the challenges that Hawley faced in framing messages during the 2015 budget shortfall crisis. Hawley was limited in her framing due to Governor Brownback's stubborn insistence that the tax cuts would work if given time. Hawley was marginally successful with her framing of schools wasting their funding by not putting enough dollars in the classroom. The school funding argument was the one frame that had enough salience that it was used by reporters and by Brownback's supporters, and is a frame still being used. The media countered the frame of schools mismanaging funds by using the emotional narrative of framing the situation as children not receiving an adequate education because of a lack of funding. Both of these frames regarding school funding played off of each other and were effective for their audiences.

Other frames used by Hawley were not effective. For example, such frames as the tax cuts created new jobs, and that the budget shortfall was not caused by the tax cuts—stating that the shortfall was instead caused by low oil, gas and agriculture valuations—were mostly unsuccessful. Hawley had little data to support these claims, but the media did have data to refute them, showing that more jobs were leaving the state than were being brought in and that the revenue lost from oil, gas and agriculture was negligible. These frames were semi-successful in the fact that the media couldn't say that they were lies. However, the media framed Hawley's frames as half-truths or not the entire story, where the Brownback administration would only pick data to support their viewpoints. The media's frame was more salient with their readers than Hawley's frames.

Framing was difficult for Hawley as the media would go to other sources for information, and she didn't have a sufficient frame or data to counteract other voices. Hawley would put subject matter experts in front of the media on the budget, however the media would find other experts that weren't on Brownback's staff. Hawley's philosophy in her job was to represent the views of the governor. She would represent his views but had difficulty framing issues due to the fact that Brownback did not want to change his strategy for dealing with the budget shortfall.

Hawley's even-toned manner and communication strategies that were anchored in truth actually backfired to the point that her acknowledgement that the budget strategy wasn't working like Brownback hoped it would was the angle that reporters latched onto. In other words, with a truthful acknowledgement that the tax cuts were not successful as had been hoped, and with no emotional narrative to show that the tax cuts were working, Hawley's framing failed. As a neutral communications professional Hawley did not use framing to rally the base of Brownback's supporters and instead, alienated them. If Hawley would have been more partisan

in her framing strategy, would more of Brownback's base have stayed loyal to him? By the end of Brownback's tenure as governor, he was deeply unpopular with an approval rating lower than twenty percent. Hawley's neutral communication style was not effective with the reporters, supporters or detractors of Brownback, leading to most everyone disliking him at the end.

It is surprising that a communications professional who was brought in because she wasn't political, as a strategy to regain the trust of a press pool, was able to regain the trust of the media, but was not able to turn around the message that the tax cuts had failed, or to present more salient messages for the media to latch onto. Hawley had the media's trust for the most part, but they still did not present her positive frames in their reporting, having a more emotional narrative to contradict her framing. Emotional narratives were more salient in the media because their readers had strong feelings that the policies were directly impacting them. Hawley was not able to use data and facts to counteract emotional arguments, because the only data she had to use was either incomplete or one-sided and the media easily found data to disprove her frames.

All the reporters mentioned Hawley's lack of political experience and suggested that lack of political experience hurt her job performance. Hawley used her experience as an effective communicator and applied it to a political job where she established good relationships with reporters and only gave information that was truthful. However, Hawley had to also do her job by representing Governor Brownback and his position that the tax cuts did not create a budget shortfall. If Hawley would have been more partisan and leaned into the messaging that the tax cuts were working, instead of admitting that they weren't, would her message have been more salient? As Hawley's neutral communication style alienated all voters from Brownback, further studies should look into political communication directors who are clearly partisan to see if that partisanship makes them more effective in the role of a communications director.

Brownback expected that eventually his great experiment of tax cuts would work, and that Kansan's would come around to seeing that the tax cuts were beneficial when the economy turned around. Hawley used that messaging, and was limited in her messages because of Brownback's refusal to change his political plan. If Hawley had kept with Brownback's message and said that the tax cuts were working and that the media was wrong in their reporting, instead of saying that the tax cuts were not working now but would in the future if given time, would more of Brownback's supporters stuck with him and the message?

Reframing was constant between Hawley's messages and the media's messages in 2015. The constant re-framing left a murky message that was easily turned into emotional arguments. Hawley's framed her arguments to be favorable towards the governor, the media reframed those messages based on their own data or emotional argument and then Hawley would again re-frame the media's message to try and become favorable to Brownback. With the constant reframing, Kansan's went towards the strongest argument, which was made by the media.

When Hawley's neutral communication style as Brownback's communications director faltered, was it the result of her not being partisan or that the frames had been set before her arrival in the administration? Brownback's first communications director, Sherriene Jones-Sontag, served the governor from 2010 to 2013. Jones-Sontag was more partisan than Hawley and pushed Brownback's policies as the only way for Kansas to go forward, leaning into the great experiment phrasing that Brownback had coined. Hawley was more inclined to admit when things weren't working and had to reframe the great experiment phrase and inherited a situation that hadn't turned for the worst yet. Hawley was already admitting that the tax cut wasn't working by the time that the shortfall reached its pinnacle in 2015. Hawley's replacement was her deputy communications director, Malika Willoughby. Willoughby was another turn towards

a partisan communications professional who frequently lashed out at the media and used social media to proclaim that the tax cuts were working well and any detractors of Brownback were wrong. Willoughby's pivot back towards partisan communication didn't work, as the opinion of Brownback was already poor, and his supporters had turned away. No amount of partisan communication style on Willoughby's part could bring back the lost support. The constant political framing and reframing failed to bring Kansans around to supporting the governor's tax policy's and the constantly changing frames did not work to bring support to the tax cuts. An opportunity for further research would be to interview Hawley's predecessor and replacement to see how their frames affected messaging and Brownback's support. Had Hawley stayed constant with Jones-Sontag's strategy of optimism and constant support of Brownback's tax cuts, would things have gone differently during the budget shortfall?

This study used in-depth interviews as the method for obtaining information from the key principal involved in this story, which allowed subjects to speak freely of their own personal experience and relationships during this time. While those interviewed provided several important details that were vital here, subjects were not always able to recall specifics or the year during which something important happened, and often talked about the budget crisis as a whole from when the tax cuts were enacted in 2012, through Brownback's reelection campaign in 2014, to when the budget shortfall became a much larger problem and was covered almost daily in 2015 and 2016. This study was able to capture specific viewpoints from the individuals interviewed, as well as determine frames presented by the subjects and those that they were able to discern from Eileen Hawley.

Future studies should consider and contrast the perceived effectiveness of more partisan political frames versus those with more neutral approaches in terms of effectiveness among

supporters and reporters alike. Other further studies can look at the perceived effects of communications directors who are political firebrands and fully support the message of their politician. Further research should also look into the relationships of reporters with a partisan communications director to see if the framing from the communications director is present in the media. Further studies can look into communications directors who are not political working for a political office not in a controversy to see if their style of communications works well outside of a controversy and to see how that style of non-political communication works well during a controversy if it had worked well before a controversy.

This study suggests that more neutral communications practices in politics during a controversy or crisis is ineffective, and that a communications director should be more partisan in the support of the political office they are representing. This study suggests that framing in a political arena should be used with a more emotional context, and finding an emotional narrative to use for framing would help the frame to be more salient.

A strength of this study is the in depth interviewing of experts who were entrenched in reporting or communicating during this crisis for several years. Most of the reporters interviewed have been working at the Kansas Statehouse as a reporter for between ten to over twenty years for the exception of Bryan Lowry. However, as previously stated, there was an extremely limited pool of reporters to interview. While it is beyond the purview of the research presented here, the pithiness of the Capitol press corps should be of concern to those who believe in open government. Perhaps a study among legislators, state agency's and office holders relating to the lack of legislative coverage would reveal ways to enhance the coverage of the Kansas Legislature in general. Such a study would perhaps work well with the curricular objectives of Washburn, the University of Kansas and Kansas State University, who could provide politically

savvy student journalists in the establishment of a reporting network, or by having their students freelance for local media outlets to increase coverage. Public relations students at Kansas universities can also gain experience by interning for government public information officers, and gain experience in the field, along with further studying the role of government communications.

Overall, this study suggests that constant reframing between communications professionals and the media can create a murky environment where frames become less salient. This study also suggests that neutral communications strategies during controversy in politics are less effective than communications strategies that lean heavily on political messaging instead of communication based on truth and trust, which seemed to alienate Brownback supporters in this case.

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Each interview was conducted between the researcher and the subjects on the following dates:

Eileen Hawley, June 11, 2018; Tim Carpenter, July 5, 2018; Martin Hawver, July 10, 2018; Peter Hancock, July 21, 2018 and Bryan Lowry, August 2, 2018. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes used as data in this study were gleaned from analysis of these interviews.

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