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## Gov. Rick Scott guided by 3 think tanks: Cato Institute, Reason Foundation, Heritage Foundation

By Janet Zink, Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

*In many cases, the governor's policies align with three like-minded groups.*

TALLAHASSEE - Individual liberty, free markets, peace.

That's the slogan of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

It, along with the similarly aligned Reason Foundation and conservative Heritage Foundation, have helped shape Gov. Rick Scott's policies on everything from education to health care to transportation.

Want to better understand the governor? Take a look at these think tanks.

Much of Scott's thinking on school vouchers and the economic benefits of free trade with Colombia and Panama comes from Cato Institute policy papers.

"That's what we do," said David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute. "We try to influence public policy."

The governor cited reports from Reason and Heritage that deemed high-speed rail a waste of taxpayer money when he decided to stop construction of a bullet train between Tampa and Orlando.

He has tapped members of the organizations for leadership roles in his transition to governor and in his administration. One of his top policy advisers is Mary Anne Carter, who worked for the Heritage Foundation.

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There are more than 1,800 think tanks in the United States that support research on public policy to educate and influence elected officials.

One of the most highly regarded is the nonpartisan Brookings Institution, whose scholars have advised President George W. Bush on education and President Barack Obama on fiscal issues and international relations.

President Ronald Reagan relied heavily on the Heritage Foundation. The president of the left-leaning Center for American Progress served as the head of Obama's transition team.

Most recently, the Reason Foundation advised Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal on education and privatization, and former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on transportation.

Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies for Cato, served on Scott's Medicaid reform transition team. He said he first became familiar with the governor when Scott launched Conservatives for Patients Rights in 2009 to fight federal health care legislation. "We saw the ads, we saw what he was doing, we invited him to speak at Cato

and he's followed our work ever since," Cannon said.

Cannon applauded Scott for backing Florida's lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the health care law signed by Obama last year, and praised the governor for refusing to implement the law in Florida while the issue winds through the courts.

Businessman Charles Koch co-founded the Cato Institute in 1977. He and his brother, David, run the nation's largest privately held company, Koch Industries.

David Koch established Americans for Prosperity, a tea party organization that has helped organize rallies in support of Scott's agenda.

The free-market, small-government philosophy of Cato infuses many of Scott's public remarks.

He has backed up his dislike of a prescription drug monitoring program that some say is crucial to helping solve the state's prescription drug abuse epidemic by saying he believes it is government invading the privacy of individuals.

He has made it clear he believes the state must end what he calls "job-killing regulations" and make Florida the most business-friendly state in the nation.

Robert Poole, transportation director for the Reason Foundation, served on Scott's economic development transition team. He gives Scott high marks so far.

"The kinds of principles he's enunciating are the kind of principles that are appropriate for a state like Florida, where spending went up too much during the boom years," he said. "We need to rein that in."

Poole generally approves of Scott's desire to invest \$77 million in dredging the Miami port to accommodate larger container ships and take advantage of emerging markets in Central and South America.

"Dredging the port is a much sounder long-term investment than high-speed rail," Poole said. "But it's only one step to be taken."

For that investment to have a major economic impact, Florida either needs to expand its own market for imports or invest in the freight rail system to better distribute shipments, Poole said.

But the governor is not in lock-step with the Reason Foundation and Cato Institute on all fronts.

Poole said when he met with Scott for about 45 minutes when the would-be governor was on the campaign trail, they differed on some key points.

"We quickly agreed to disagree about a number of social issues," he said. Specifically, he mentioned mailers highlighting Scott's opposition to stem-cell research and abortion.

"On the size and scope of state government and taxation being potentially economically damaging, on letting markets work to invigorate the economy, we're in agreement," Poole said. "There's a whole array of social issues where the government is making choices for people. My colleagues and I at the Reason Foundation believe people should make those choices on their own."

Another case in point: Cato and Reason support legalization of marijuana.

Scott's campaign guru and pollster recently conducted a survey that showed nearly 60 percent of Florida voters - almost enough to approve a constitutional amendment - support legalizing medical marijuana.

But a spokesman for Scott said the governor does not support legalizing medical marijuana.

Still, the governor is likely to continue relying on the Heritage and Reason foundations and Cato Institute for guidance.

Consider this: When he delivered a keynote speech last month at a Cato Institute seminar in Naples, he ended his remarks with praise for the organization's solid arguments.

"The biggest thing that I always liked about Cato is they're so logical in their thinking and what they write that it makes it difficult for people on the other side," he said.

"I don't know why anybody would think the other way."

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#### >> On the Web

Cato Institute

"Individual liberty, free  
markets and peace"

[cato.org](http://cato.org)

Reason Foundation

"Free minds and free  
markets"

[reason.org](http://reason.org)


Heritage Foundation

"Leadership for America"

[heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

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