



Editorial: Measuring Freedom

August 20, 2016

We noticed the Cato Institute recently released its biennial “Freedom in the 50 States” report. The ranking scores all 50 states “on fiscal policy, regulatory policy, and personal freedom.” Cato weights “public policies according to the estimated costs that government restrictions on freedom impose on their victims.”

New Hampshire ranked number 1 - the freest state in the country. Vermont ranked number 40.

The “Live Free or Die State” lives up to its billing thanks to low state taxes (less than any other state but Alaska), fiscal decentralization, autonomy in local governance and strong commitments to personal freedoms.

For its part, Vermont isn’t bad for personal freedoms but remains “one of the highest-tax states in the country... and extremely fiscally centralized.” Taxes are so high that we would likely rank as the least free state if not for liberal gun rights (which gubernatorial candidate Sue Minter wants to restrict, incidentally). The report writers urge legislators to “Undo the past two decades of centralization with a constitutional amendment limiting state government responsibility for education. Return property tax-varying power and school budgeting power fully to towns, and reduce state aid to a low level. Use the proceeds to cut income taxes.”

As we’ve always said, New Hampshire’s most lucrative economic asset is the Vermont Legislature. As the report explains “The three states of northern New England still pose a stark contrast in economic policies and, for most of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, economic outcomes.”

Someday, we pray, Vermont voters will figure out that prosperity and freedom cannot come from Montpelier.