



## **Oklahoma gets top marks in Cato's Freedom in the 50 States report**

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NORMAN, Okla. – Oklahoma just might be doing something right, if the latest “Freedom in the 50 States” report is any indication. Released annually, the libertarian Cato Institute ranks all 50 states based on the level of economic and personal freedom each affords its citizens.

This year, Oklahoma nabbed third place, which is pretty impressive if you think about it, and a nice silver lining to the procession of stories of cronies running wild here in the Sooner state.

The authors look at a variety of factors when deciding each state's rank, including taxation levels, regulation, prison sentencing, etc. Basically they observe how much the average citizen is restricted, robbed, and generally harassed by the State on a day-to-day basis, all while being force-fed a sermon about how it's for their own good.

The authors note that Oklahoma is the most-improved state in the list, moving from 32nd place in the year 2000, to 3rd place in 2016. We are among the lowest-taxed states in the land, with lower than average debt levels compared to the national average.

Yet we are blessed with a larger than average legion of bureaucrats who are busy finding ways to spend those tax dollars.

According to the report, our state has little land-use regulation, “excellent” labor law, no state-level minimum wage, and good anti-discrimination laws on the books.

The report notes that “the court system is relatively good, due to tort reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s.”

The authors give a nod to Oklahoma's plague of civil asset forfeiture abuse, an issue that might have taken a more prominent place in the report. The report mentions, in passing, that it is still

possible to get a life sentence for a single marijuana offense not involving minors, here in the third-freest state in the U.S.

An Okie can still be saddled with a two-year minimum for cultivating a prohibited plant as well, something the report notes.

Oklahoma does do poorly on alcohol freedom, what with its miserable ban on happy hour, ban on direct wine shipment, ban on wine and spirits in grocery stores, and the statewide blue laws.

The report notes that Oklahomans enjoy a wide-ranging freedom of education, with almost no regulation on homeschooling and private schools.

At the end of the report, we get a short list of “policy recommendations” that fall a bit flat. There are plenty of Oklahomans that have better ideas.

Still, legalizing happy hour, Sunday alcohol sales, direct wine shipments, and getting that strong stuff stocked in the local Homeland does have a nice ring to it, but I do know plenty of Okies that would prefer not to get ground underfoot by the legal system for growing and smoking a plant. Or putting in place safeguards to prevent law enforcement from burglarizing them on the side of the road.

Legalizing “nurse practitioner independent practice with full prescription authority” would give far more Oklahomans access to healthcare than they currently have, and would move Oklahoma two spaces up on regulatory policy.

All in all, the ranking is good, but there does seem to be a gloss over other issues that might knock us a few spots lower on their scale. But Okies did well according to their criteria, the same criteria that makes California and New York appear as razor-wired Soviet satellites by comparison.

Still, we’ll take it. We work hard to suck less, and we appreciate when we’re recognized for it.