Cato Institute Ranks Missouri 18th in Freedom, Down Six Slots in Four Years

The think tank scored states based on more than 200 fiscal and regulatory policies and personal freedom.

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Missourians aren't as "free" as they were four years ago, according to the Cato Institute's "Freedom in the 50 States" study. The Show-Me State ranks as the 18th "most free" state, down six slots from a 12th place rank in 2014.

Cato—a Libertarian think tank that describes itself as a "public policy research organization dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace"— ranked states based on more than 200 fiscal and regulatory policies and personal freedom.

Personal freedoms include freedom to own and carry firearms, pursue education, gamble, drink alcohol, consume marijuana, and travel. Economic freedoms include freedom of choice on land use and health insurance, as well as ease of entering the job market. It also takes into account taxes and how much states subsidize private businesses.

Cato declared the nation's "freest states" New Hampshire, Alaska, Oklahoma, Indiana, and South Dakota. The bottom five: New York, California, Hawaii, New Jersey, and Maryland.

According to Cato, "Missouri is one of the country's freer states, but in recent years it has run the risk of falling back into the middle of the pack." To improve its freedom ranking, Cato recommends that Missouri make changes in these respective policies:

Fiscal: Adopt a gubernatorial item reduction veto, which is associated with lower spending over the long run.

Regulatory: Enact a right-to-work law that would not infringe on freedom of association. In 2014, this move would have raised Missouri eight places on the regulatory policy ranking.

Personal: Expand gun rights in a manner more consistent with the state's conservative ideology. Allow nonresident licenses, permit guns on all private property with permission, allow possession and carry at age 18, and expand the right of self-defense in public.