



Think tank: Florida is a national leader in liberty

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The word freedom has been tossed around a lot lately in Florida.

Of course, there's the much talked about freedom from mandates — be it masks or vaccines. And Gov. Ron DeSantis' 2022-2023 fiscal year budget for the state, released Dec. 9, is called the Freedom First Budget.

More freedom? Florida scored No. 2 in the country in the recently released sixth edition of the Cato Institute's Freedom in the 50 States report. What the libertarian think tank calls an index of personal and economic freedom, the report is a revised and updated ranking of each state on "their policies (that) promote freedom in the fiscal, regulatory and personal realms."

Florida has been No. 2 five years running now, after it's first-ever No. 1 ranking in 2015. Perennial No. 1 New Hampshire — its motto is Live Free or Die — again beat out Florida. Nevada, Tennessee, and South Dakota round out the top five. The bottom five, the most restrictive and regulatory-heavy states, are Oregon at No. 46, followed by New Jersey, California, Hawaii and New York.

The Cato report points out Florida's calling cards — no individual income tax and a warm climate that attracts retirees— before adding this: "the state attracts more than seniors, as others vote with their feet for good weather and the increased opportunity afforded by Florida's freer society. Florida does especially well on economic freedom, and even more so on fiscal policy."

The report's authors, William Ruger and Jason Sorens, analyzed some 230 policy variables to rank the states in more than 20 categories. Some nuggets from the Florida report include:

- Government consumption and debt are lower than average. Government employment is much below average, falling from 11.2% of private employment in 2010 to 8.3% in 2019.
- The civil liability system is better than average and has improved significantly since the 2000s.
- "As we long recommended," the authors write, "the state finally reformed its homeowners' insurance sector along competitive lines in 2017, and it also opened up auto insurance rate-

setting slightly in 2018. On the other side of the ledger, the state is far below average on occupational freedom and has a certificate-of-need law for hospitals.”

- “Land-use regulation appears to be a major political issue, but the courts have tools to restrain local governments, as the state has a particularly strong regulatory takings law,” the report states. “Florida has gone further than just about any other state to tighten criteria for eminent domain.”