

Freedom study ranks Oklahoma 19th among states

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(The Center Square) – With some of the lowest taxes in the country, Oklahoma has taken a substantial leap in the Cato Institute’s Freedom in the 50 States index, jumping from 27th in 2016 to 19th this year.

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank based in Washington, ranked states based on personal and economic freedoms.

“Oklahoma is among the most improved states for the 2000–2019 period, with some regression in 2015–2016 and then a return to the upswing more recently,” the Cato report said. “It used to be a bottom-10 state for overall freedom and second worst for personal freedom. Now the Sooner State is about average on both because of rising personal freedom and declining relative economic freedom.”

While noting low taxes compared with the rest of the country, Cato pointed out local and state taxes have risen in the past few years. State and local debt remains lower than the national average, however.

Education also is changing in the state. Taxpayers receive a small tax benefit for private scholarship fund contributions. Homeschools and private schools enjoy little to no state regulation.

Incarcerations are increasing in the state. Oklahoma ranked 45th in the category, which considers incarceration rates, nondrug crime arrests and drug enforcement.

“Drug arrests have bounced around,” the report said. “Civil asset forfeiture reform has not gone far, but revenues are down. A life sentence is still possible for a single cannabis offense not involving minors. The mandatory minimum sentence is two years for even small-scale cultivation.”

Oklahoma does not have stringent land use regulations. Researchers for the Cato Institute also noted residents enjoy a high degree of insurance freedom.

Cato suggested Oklahoma officials should reduce the state government payroll and use the revenue to cut the sales tax. It also recommended doing away with mandatory minimum sentences for what are considered victimless crimes.