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Hawaii ranks near bottom in freedom report

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(The Center Square) – With already low levels of economic freedom and shrinking personal freedom, Hawaii ranked as one of the least free states in the U.S., according to the Cato Institute's Freedom in the 50 States report.

The Cato Institute, a Washington-based think tank, ranked states based on personal and economic freedoms. Hawaii came in 49th, ahead of only New York, which finished last.

The report's authors criticized Hawaii's fiscal policy, characterizing it as “decidedly tax and spend.” State taxes rose from 8.3% of personal income to 10.5% in 2020.

Cato noted there has been a steady flow of residents leaving Hawaii for other parts of the U.S. over the past decade.

“Local government also taxes at a very high level given how little it has to do,” Cato said.

An analysis showed Hawaii spends higher than the national average for air transportation, sanitation, sewage, parks and recreation, public buildings and hospitals. The authors recommended cutting spending in those areas, as well as cutting local taxes.

Cato cited a few high points about freedoms in Hawaii. The state has seen improvements in civil liability and below average incarceration and drug enforcement rates. Victimless crime arrests also have decreased. The authors also pointed out a tiny win for personal freedom: Hawaii doesn't require adults to wear helmets on motorcycles.

The authors criticized the state's regulatory policies.

“Hawaii does poorly in almost every area of regulatory policy, but its two worst categories are land-use and labor-market freedom,” read the report, suggesting Hawaii would benefit from relaxing its land-use regulations.

There are no laws preventing abuse of eminent domain, no right-to-work law and strict mandates are in place for workers' compensation and disability insurance. An “unfair sales” law does not allow businesses to sell at prices that are “too low.”

The state’s gun laws are the worst in the country, the authors said.

“It is virtually impossible to get a concealed-carry license, all Class III weapons are banned, there is comprehensive registration and purchase permitting of firearms, dealers are licensed, ‘assault weapons’ are banned, large-capacity firearm magazines are banned, and so on,” the report read.

States at the top of the list for freedom in the U.S. were New Hampshire, Florida, Nevada, Tennessee and South Dakota.