



Measuring freedom in Florida

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History demonstrates that freedom is ephemeral. Nations go to war, revise constitutions or replace monarchs and strongmen. But as freedom is the natural state of the human race, how do you know you are free?

What if you could measure it? Measuring the freedom of markets and peoples creates a competitive marketplace to be the most free. Measurement harnesses the very attributes you are measuring to start a chain reaction. The nuclear fission of freedom.

The concept is exciting, and the potential to bring this competitive liberty index to other areas of government would quantify the case for conservative governance. Imagine knowing how your city or county ranks in terms of debt per resident, tax burden, quality of services, and more. Accountability and transparency of performance is the future. And that future is today.

The Cato Institute just released its annual "Freedom in the 50 States" report. The study ranks states, "on the basis of how their policies promote freedom in the fiscal, regulatory, and personal realms."

I am proud to report that Florida is No. 1 — and for good reason.

Among other things, the report lauds Florida for having no income tax, low government consumption rates, low government debt, restrictions on eminent domain usage, high degrees of labor freedom, strict civil asset forfeiture laws, and extraordinary educational freedom.

We are honored and pleased to be recognized as the tip of freedom's spear. But we won't rest on our laurels.

We will continue to put students and parents before unions and bureaucrats when it comes to educating our kids. For example, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program was established in 2001 to encourage private, voluntary contributions from corporate donors to nonprofit scholarship funding organizations that award scholarships to children from low-income families. It provides scholarships to nearly 100,000 students to attend a private school of their choice or assist with transportation costs to attend another public school. Recipients are over 70 percent minority and nearly all come from poverty. The program embraces choice, freedom, and free markets and we will defend it.

In education, the debate over competition and choice is settled. It works.

One area where competition and choice could work wonders is in health care. Florida ranks in the middle of the pack at No. 30 when it comes to health insurance. We will work tirelessly to improve that grade I can assure you. We will continue to reject Obamacare/Medicaid bribes with borrowed money. We will again attempt to repeal the "certificate of need" hospital monopoly regime and increase supply when it comes to choices for patients. We will encourage the use of lower cost/higher quality ambulatory surgical centers and post-surgical recovery centers. We will encourage tele-medicine and measure progress utilizing tools like patient culture surveys. These publicly available, anonymous surveys allow doctors and nurses to honestly assess facilities which will invariably inform patient choices.

One area where Florida is falling short is in requiring too many professions be licensed by the state.

Florida requires licenses for interior designers, auctioneers, cosmetologists, athlete agents, and landscapers – just to name a few. To put it in perspective nationwide, in 1950 just 5 percent of all workers performed a job that required a license. That number is now closer to 30 percent. That is unacceptable, and we will attempt to address it in the coming terms of the Legislature.

On these and dozens of other issues, Florida stands for freedom of the individual. We hope and pray our 49 state compatriots join Florida's charge toward freedom's future.

President Ronald Reagan reminded us in his farewell address that man is not free unless government is limited. That, "There's a clear cause and effect here that is as neat and predictable as a law of physics: As government expands, liberty contracts."

Together let us all heed those words, expand liberty, and watch America soar.