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Cato grades the governors: Pawlenty, Jindal get As

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The fiscal conservative-libertarians at [Cato Institute](#) have issued a report card for current governors, and they aren't exactly generous with the praise. If a C is the minimum passing grade, then just 27 out of 50 states manage to keep from failing the test. At the top of the list, [the Wall Street Journal reports](#), are at least two presidential aspirants — Tim Pawlenty and Bobby Jindal, and a third that gets a B, Mitch Daniels:

The Cato report card gives the lowest grades to Governors who proposed or enacted the biggest tax and spending increases, while Governors who cut or held the line on taxes and reduced spending go to the head of the class. Raising income and business taxes are the most harmful to a state economy — Exhibits A and B would be New York and California—so Governors who raised those taxes were heavily penalized. The nearby table shows the list of the Governors who earned grades of A and F.

...

The Governors who received the highest grades in the Cato report proved that budgets can be balanced without raising tax rates even in severe downturns. Several Governors—Indiana's Mitch Daniels, South Carolina's Mark Sanford, Louisiana's Bobby Jindal, Texas's Rick Perry, New Jersey's Chris Christie and Virginia's Bob McDonnell have reset their 2011 spending to 2007 or 2008 levels. Many Governors also responded to lower revenue collections by selling state assets that are better managed in private hands: casinos, toll-roads, state-owned liquor stores, even buildings and land.

Cato gave four As, the other two going to beleaguered executives in the East, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Mark Sanford of South Carolina. Manchin has no problems with support as Governor, but he's discovering that West Virginia voters would rather keep him in that position and send a Republican to the US Senate. Sanford, of course, is running out the clock after a disastrous personal scandal resulted in divorce and embarrassment, but he's still working hard and pushing fiscally conservative policy in his state.

Of those with presidential aspirations on the list, Pawlenty is probably the most open about those ambitions and the one working the hardest to build a network as a launch platform. This report will certainly help, as it highlights the tough line Pawlenty has had to hold against a Democrat-dominated legislature and a financial crisis that would have overwhelmed others:

Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota has proposed pro-growth tax reforms, opposed tax increases, and been

a relatively frugal budgeter. He has proposed cutting the state's high and uncompetitive corporate franchise tax, and he has repeatedly vetoed giant tax-hike packages passed by the legislature, including increases to gasoline taxes, beer taxes, wine taxes, and income taxes. Under Pawlenty, state general fund spending rose modestly between FY03 and FY08 and has decreased substantially since then. The governor has also proposed a state constitutional amendment to limit general fund spending growth.

Pawlenty hasn't won every battle, but he's won *almost* all of them, a remarkable achievement in a state that clings bitterly to its progressive roots.

Some of these governors on the list are currently running for another term or another office. Pat Quinn, who took over for Rod Blagojevich when he got indicted for corruption, gets an F for his efforts to hike taxes and increase spending in Illinois. Deval Patrick may be trailing in Massachusetts, no doubt for the same reason Cato gives him a D in this report. Ohio's Ted Strickland is definitely in the fight of his life for the same policies that got him a D from Cato, and Charlie Crist might have been better advised to run for a certain re-election rather than get into a dogfight for the US Senate, where Marco Rubio long ago exposed him as a D student as well.

We don't have too many A students in this class, and we should be grooming them for advancement.



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