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## Vote for Florida's continued prosperity

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As we enter the home stretch of the election season of 2018, a recent study by the Cato Institute is worth a mention. The key to this well-done piece of research is in Florida's rankings, and the long path of prosperity Florida has trekked over the last 20 years.

Cato's fifth biennial "Freedom in the 50 States" report illustrates vividly to the rest of the country what we should realize more here in Florida – when it comes to freedom, it just doesn't get better than the Sunshine State. Florida placed No. 1 in the rankings in terms of overall freedoms enjoyed by the state's residents.

That stands in stark contrast to, say, New York (with roughly the same population), which came in dead last. So what makes Florida top dog and New York bottom of the barrel? Most of it can be explained by striking differences between the two states in terms of policy priorities and tax structure.

At the top of the list should be Florida's lack of an individual state income tax. Both young and old are flocking to Florida in record numbers, presumably for the same reason — to escape oppressive taxes imposed upon them by their home states. Every single day hundreds move to the Sunshine State, with no signs of the influx slowing down.

New York's top tax rate is the eighth highest in the U.S – so understandably those affected the most are moving here. First they flee their home state for greener pastures, and then they contribute to our economy through their careers, local taxes, sales taxes, investments in local businesses and real estate purchases.

The irony of it all is that New York is losing out on the same tax income that it had hoped to earn by imposing higher taxes on its citizens. Indeed, over a million people have left New York and moved on since 2010.

Florida's job growth rate is second in the country right now, which translates into 220,000 additional jobs for Floridians versus the same time last year.

Moreover, Florida has an unemployment rate of 3.7 percent, versus New York's 4.3 percent. There is a direct correlation. Government has nothing to give citizens, except simply what it must take from someone else. When citizens keep more of their own money, they save or spend it as they wish. Either way it contributes to the economy.

The Empire State has a staggering annual budget of \$171 billion – the second highest in the

nation, behind only California. Florida's budget of \$87 billion looks meager in comparison, illustrating the compelling argument that Floridians are receiving far better value per taxpayer dollar when it comes to such significant markers of economic prosperity as job growth and unemployment rates. So the important question is: Will we be able to hold on to all our successes into the future?

In less than 50 days, the public will cast their votes and make their choices known. Representative democracy carries risks with it – our liberty and prosperity are not a guarantee. They are forged in the weeds of policy agendas and by the responses of more than 20 million Floridians involved in businesses, homes and schools from Pensacola to Key West.

We'll find out on Nov. 7.