

The logo for the Sarasota Herald-Tribune. It features a small globe icon to the left of the word "SARASOTA" in a sans-serif font. Below "SARASOTA" is the word "Herald-Tribune" in a large, bold, serif font.

Conservative think tank gives Scott a "D" on fiscal policies

By Lloyd Dunkelberger , Herald-Tribune

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If you needed more proof that Gov. Rick Scott is playing to the middle in his re-election bid, the conservative Cato Institute offered confirmation by giving Scott a “D” on its annual report card on governors and their fiscal policy.

Scott, who earned an “A” from the right-leaning think tank in 2012, had a low score mainly due to increased state spending _ as evidenced by a record \$77 billion budget this year _ and no moves to cut the state’s major tax rates, including the sales tax and corporate income tax. He was even chided for supporting the expansion of Medicaid _ although Cato notes it has yet to happen in Florida.

Scott did earn kudos for more than \$400 million in motor vehicle cuts this year.

Interestingly, Scott fell behind many of the conservative Republican governors that he is often compared to, including Texas Gov. Rick Perry, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who all earned “B’s.”

Scott escaped being lumped with the eight Democratic governors who flunked, with California Gov. Jerry Brown, being placed at the bottom of the gubernatorial grading class.

Scott is more fairly compared to other Republican governors facing significant re-election challenges, including Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, who also earned “D’s” like Scott.

Here is Cato’s summary on Scott:

“Governor Scott received an “A” on Cato’s 2012 report card based on his support of spending restraint and business tax reforms. In recent years, he has continued to push for tax reforms, but spending has risen briskly, pushing down his score on this report.

“In 2012 he increased the exemption level for the corporate income tax from \$25,000 to \$50,000, and he expanded the sales tax exemption for manufacturing equipment. He also proposed

expanding the property tax exemption for tangible business property. In 2013 he approved a three-year elimination of sales taxes on manufacturing equipment.

“In 2014 he pushed to raise the exemption level for the corporate tax to \$75,000 and also proposed other business tax relief. His big fiscal success this year was signing into law a \$400 million cut to vehicle fees. Unfortunately, Scott has allowed state spending to increase substantially. General fund spending rose 6 percent in 2013 and about 10 percent in 2014. Also, he supports expanding Florida’s Medicaid program under the ACA, but that proposal has not passed the state legislature.”