



Cato Institute ranks Cooper 6th best governor for signing Republican budget

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Another free-market think tank has ranked Democratic North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper positively with regard to fiscal policy, with the Cato Institute's new governor's rankings putting Cooper 6th overall. Cooper was the only Democrat in the top 10 and received a "B" grade overall.

Cato's report created scores for governors "on the basis of seven tax and spending variables. Scores closer to 100 indicate governors who favor smaller-government policies." They listed Cooper among 16 governors that had signed income-tax cuts into law and among 10 governors that had signed cuts to the top corporate income tax.

"Gov. Cooper is receiving high marks as a fiscal conservative in spite of himself," said Brian Balfour, the John Locke Foundation's senior vice president of research. "After vetoing three straight budget bills, Cooper felt backed into a corner and has signed the last two budget bills sent to him by the conservative legislature. If instead Cooper had gotten his wish and his proposed budgets had been enacted, he would be receiving a far lower ranking."

Like the Alec rankings earlier in the year, which had Cooper 22nd of 50, the Cato ranking analyzed the budgets and tax policies that the governors signed. Analysts say this is useful to rank the finished product of states overall, but may not say a lot about where the governors stood in negotiations. Cooper, for example, signed the 2022 budget after Republicans pushed for lower spending and taxes, and **Cooper's proposed budget pushed for an 8.5% increase** in spending.

Alec chief economist Jonathan Williams **told Carolina Journal** at the time of their rankings, "Gov. Cooper should thank the free-market legislature from previous years and currently for keeping North Carolina's economy strong and those policy elements in some of the most competitive shape in the country. We're just big fans of North Carolina's tax-reform experiment in the past decade, and I think it has produced dividends. And now Gov. Cooper presides over a strong economy thanks to free-market reform."