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Conservative organization gives LePage high marks for fiscal policy

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Maine Gov. Paul LePage received the highest grade among all governors in a 2016 fiscal report card released Wednesday by the Cato Institute, a national libertarian-leaning organization that advocates for smaller government.

LePage was one of five governors, all Republicans, to receive an “A” grade, and his overall score of 75 was tops.

The report cited LePage’s efforts to cut income taxes and his shrinking of government as the biggest reasons for his high score.

“Paul LePage of Maine has been a staunch fiscal conservative. He has held down spending growth, and state government employment has fallen 9 percent since he took office,” the report said. “LePage has been a persistent tax cutter. In 2011 he approved large income tax cuts, which reduced the top individual rate and simplified tax brackets. In 2015 he vetoed a tax-cut plan passed by the legislature partly because the cut was not large enough. The legislature overrode him, and Maine enjoyed another income tax reduction. In 2016 LePage pushed for more reforms, including estate tax repeal and further income tax rate cuts.”

LePage’s office put out a news release touting its grade.

“It’s all about implementing good economic policies that will help the Maine people; this is what I care about,” the governor said in a statement.

LePage has gotten high marks previously from the Cato Institute, which was founded by Charles Koch and is funded by the Koch brothers, perhaps the best known financiers of Republican and conservative politicians and policy organizations.

The four other governors who earned “A”s were: Pat McCrory of North Carolina, Rick Scott of Florida, Doug Ducey of Arizona and Mike Pence of Indiana, who is presidential candidate Donald Trump’s running mate.

Among the 10 governors who were awarded “F” grades by the Cato Institute, seven were Democrats, including Peter Shumlin of Vermont and Daniel Malloy of Connecticut.