

THE MERCURY

Pa.'s 'Gov. Revenue' wants to spend more of your money

By Paul Kengor
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Not long after Pennsylvania voters bucked the national trend and exchanged a Republican governor for a Democrat — a very left-leaning one — the Cato Institute's annual “Fiscal Report Card on America's Governors” arrived in my mailbox. I eagerly looked to see where Cato ranked the best and worst tax-and-spenders, with an eye toward Gov. Tom Corbett, a fiscally responsible governor who sadly did not excite the Pennsylvania electorate.

Of the nation's 50 governors, 27 scored a “C” or higher. Only four received “A's,” all of them Republicans. Tied for the top were Govs. Pat McCrory, R-N.C., and Sam Brownback, R-Kan. The six highest scores went to Republicans. Of the top 13, all are Republicans with the exception of West Virginia's Earl Ray Tomblin. Several are Republican presidential prospects: Mike Pence, Susana Martinez, Rick Perry, Nikki Haley and Scott Walker (with Pence ranking highest).

As for the worst tax-and-spenders, eight governors received “F's.” All are Democrats; in fact, the bottom 12 are all Democrats. (For the record, the Cato Institute is not a Republican think tank but unapologetically libertarian.) The four worst, beginning with the very worst, are Govs. Jerry Brown, D-Calif.; John Hickenlooper, D-Colo.; Deval Patrick, D-Mass.; and Pat Quinn, D-Ill. Not coincidentally, all are blue Obama states.

And so is, for that matter, Pennsylvania, which just handed the keys of its governor's mansion to a liberal Democrat whose previous public experience was, as state Revenue secretary, all about tax and spending.

How did Tom Corbett fare in Cato's ranking of governors?

Corbett ranked 24th, barely earning a “C” and just escaping the Big Government bottom half. Corbett actually received an “A” the year before. This time, Cato docked him “mainly because of his support for a huge tax increase for transportation,” which is projected to yank \$1 billion from the wallets of Pennsylvania motorists.

Cato also demoted Corbett for “support(ing) efforts to raise the cigarette tax by \$2 a pack to fund Philadelphia schools.” How's that for a wealth transfer? Smokers cough up \$2 extra per pack to funnel more dollars into the insatiable belly of Philadelphia's school system.

To his credit, Cato noted that Tom Corbett has been, overall, “a fiscal reformer” whose “record on spending is quite good.” In 2012, Corbett signed a bill to phase out Pennsylvania's capital stock and franchise tax and largely kept the lid on general fund spending. Cato highlighted Corbett's opposition to a severance tax on the energy industry.

That brings me to Pennsylvania Gov.-elect Tom Wolf, who is gung-ho on taxing energy producers who (as he puts it) have been let “off the hook ... at the expense of Pennsylvania students, parents, and teachers.”

The Cato report got me thinking: How will Pennsylvania's new governor rank in Cato's next analysis?

During the campaign, Wolf portrayed himself as the populist from central Pennsylvania farm country, cruising around in his modest Jeep, crusading against greedy gas producers and fat-cat cretins stuffing their pockets with precious dollars that in a just world would all be siphoned to public schools — which (ask any liberal) can never have enough money.

What Wolf really is, in fact and in heart, is the former head of Pennsylvania's Department of Revenue, appointed by Gov. Ed Rendell. He is less the governor from Amish country as he is the governor from Revenue.

Left unhindered to pursue his redistributionist hopes and dreams, arm in arm with his brethren in the public-sector unions, Wolf would become Gov. Revenue, earning a spot nearer the governors of Colorado and California. The only thing that will save him from himself and fiscal ignominy is the Republican Legislature that schizophrenic Pennsylvanians elected along with their new liberal Democrat governor. Get ready for a wild ride.