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Indiana Gov. Pence tops 2016 GOP field on fiscal scorecard

By Stephen Dinan

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Indiana Gov. Mike Pence was named a "champion tax cutter," in the Cato Institute's new statehouse report card, released Thursday, which puts Mr. Pence at the top of all of the GOP governors mentioned as potential 2016 presidential contenders.

Mr. Pence was one of four governors to earn an "A" grade from Cato, while a host of governors with presidential aspirations notched "B" grades: Texas Gov. Rick Perry, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez and South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley.

Also striking was the "B" grade for New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, the second-highest scoring Democrat, behind West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin.

The report card covered the last two years, and Cato said with the economy rebounding, governors and legislatures are trying to decide whether to return money to taxpayers or to expand government programs. Cato, a libertarian-leaning think tank, gave higher grades to governors who showed fiscal restraint.

Under Mr. Pence, Indiana's spending grew slightly, but his "revenue" score, which included proposed and enacted tax cuts, was strong.

Meanwhile, Cato said Mr. Christie, a favorite of many establishment Republicans, scored well on tax cuts — though the analysts said he "has a weakness for handing out narrow tax breaks and subsidies to businesses" rather than broad tax cuts that would apply to everyone.

As for Mr. Cuomo, he saw his score bolstered by a major tax cut package for businesses that he signed this year.