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Cato Backs Away from Crist Radio Spot - Reporters Notebook

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By [Jared Halpern, Reporter](#) @ November 4, 2009 9:27 AM [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBacks \(0\)](#)

If you've listened to WOKV for any length of time in recent weeks, you've no doubt heard Governor Charlie Crist's radio spots touting his Cato Institute credentials.

"I'm proud to say I was ranked number one in America," Crist says in one version of the campaign spot, citing a 2008 Governor's Report Card on fiscal responsibility.

Here's the problem.

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The [Cato Institute report card](#) was issued in the summer of 2008, about 16 months into the Governor's term and on the heels of property tax rate cuts statewide (a move many local lawmakers would argue was not so responsible in the first place.)

The rating also came out before Crist's acceptance (and embrace, literally) of President Obama's Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act program.

"This year the governor signed into law a \$2.2 billion tax increase for the fiscal 2010 budget down here in Florida," Chris Edwards, director of tax policy at the Cato Institute and author of the 2008 report card told me in an interview this week. " Those tax hikes were largely in the form of a dollar a pack increase the price of cigarettes, high fees at the DMV, increased traffic fines and a hike to the unemployment tax passed on to business owners.

None appeared to be fully supported by Governor Crist and were approved by the Republican-controlled legislature, faced with a multi-billion dollar spending shortfall. Nonetheless, Edwards thinks when the new Governor's Report Card is issued next year, Crist will likely see a dip in his score.

"Most governors probably will not raise taxes this year or next year," he said. "And thus, Crist will not look very good." Edwards also points to South Carolina Republican Governor Mark Sanford. Sanford also received an 'A' grade from Cato (along with West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin), but was a vocal critic of the stimulus program.

"If you give a governor an 'A' you would like to see him continue down the same path of fiscal responsibility," Edwards said.

The Crist campaign did not return an email seeking comment on this story.

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