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1889 INSTITUTE RECOMMENDS TOP-TEN STATE RANKINGS WORTH PURSUING

Some popular rankings don't make the cut

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK (February 20, 2019) – Oklahoma has recently prioritized becoming a Top-ten State, but has yet to precisely define that metric. In that spirit, the 1889 Institute, an Oklahoma state policy think tank, has published “Ten Top Tens: State Rankings Worth Pursuing.” This publication identifies ten broad policy categories worth pursuing by a state looking for top-ten status.

Specific valid metrics for which states can be meaningfully ranked are identified for each category. Also highlighted are some specific rankings which are popular and often cited by media, but which are not valid for public policy purposes.

The ten areas where state government can at least indirectly have a measurable, positive impact, as identified by the 1889 Institute, are: education, economic well-being, economic neutrality, government efficiency and accountability, regulation, health, transportation effectiveness, court systems, public safety, and recreation.

“We looked at each of these areas and recognized that they are too broad and complex to be boiled down to a single metric for ranking all the states,” said the study’s primary author, Michael R. Davis, Research Fellow at the 1889 Institute. “We also wanted to contrast sound rankings with rankings where being at the top is actually a bad sign for a state’s long term economic health. It’s disturbing how much good press some of them get,” he said.

Coauthor Vance Fried, Senior Fellow at the Institute and Professor Emeritus in Free Enterprise at Oklahoma State University, said that many state rankings he has seen make the news, but have no validity in public policy. “There are so many rankings that equate spending with quality,” said Fried, “but this assumes more and better outcomes just based on dollars spent.” “Any state’s goal should be to spend the least in an area and get the best results, but when states are ranked purely on spending, it’s as if we are trying to spend the most, but results don’t matter,” he said.

One area focused on was education, with valid rankings to include: academic performance adjusted for demographics, cost effectiveness of public education, and average cost of a 4-year college degree. Invalid measures include: average teacher salary, spending per student, and pre-K enrollment levels.

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About the 1889 Institute

The 1889 Institute is an Oklahoma think tank committed to independent, principled state policy fostering limited and responsible government, free enterprise and a robust civil society. The publication, “Ten Top Tens: State Rankings Worth Pursuing” can be found on the nonprofit’s website at <https://1889institute.org/fiscal-policy>.