

# SPR

VOLUME 28

ISSUE 1

## In This Issue

### **Extending ARRA FMAPs** **2**

States relied heavily on the flexible fiscal assistance they received in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Much of that aid is now winding down, but efforts are underway to extend one of the most valuable components.

### **The State of Gun Laws in States** **4**

The Brady Campaign recently graded states on their adoption of its preferred laws and regulations. The National Rifle Association has no such state grade card, but it does provide descriptions of its positions on many of the policies the Brady Campaign champions. Unsurprisingly, the two organizations seldom agree.

### **Technical Notes** **7**

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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ISSUE 2

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### **States and the Census** **2**

As the decennial census gets underway, a recent analysis by the Brookings Institution underscores the ability of states to maximize their federal grant revenues by maximizing their population counts.

### **A Gratitude for Debt** **6**

Among the tried-and-true strategies states employ during economic downturns is to shift spending from the operating to the capital budget, where it can be financed over a longer time horizon. States vary considerably in their current levels of debt, their recent increases in the use of debt, and their measured creditworthiness. All of these factors affect their ability to employ this strategy during the current downturn.

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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ISSUE 3

## In This Issue

### **Pew on Pensions** 2

There was once a conventional wisdom that public employees implicitly accepted lower pay but received better pensions. It's not clear whether that remains true, although public employers are among the last to offer defined benefit plans. In a recent report, the Pew Center on the States suggests that the public may not be willing to finance public systems that offer benefits well in excess of those found in the private sector. Moreover, Pew identifies a host of practices that have compromised state pension systems and puts forth five policies that can help to remedy the situation.

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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ISSUE 4

## In This Issue

### **Bad News that May be Good News** 2

In the most recent report on state tax collections, all three major tax sources are still recording year-over-year declines. The good news is that the declines are smaller than they have been, suggesting that the worst may be behind us. Only time will tell whether the encouraging trend lines can be sustained.

### **Energy States March to Beat of Different Drummer** 5

The last several national recessions have been accompanied by an increase in energy prices. While the majority of states fell victim to these recessions, the small group of states that rely on energy for a significant share of their state economies have benefited.

### **Technical Notes** 9

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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ISSUE 5

## In This Issue

### The 2010 Camelot Index

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The Camelot Index was developed by *Reports* founding editor Hal Hovey several years ago. It is based on the premise that most people share a common set of preferences: fewer taxes are better than more, small class sizes are better than large, low death rates are better than high, less crime is better than more and so on.

Many studies incorporate such preferences, but they often focus on just one area. For example, a study may attempt to identify the “healthiest” state but ignore the fact that health care isn’t delivered in a vacuum; it may be traded off with something else.

The Camelot Index brings together measures of economic vitality, health, education, crime, society and government. In the current Index, many states rank consistently across measures, while others do quite well on some measures but not on others. The historic dominance of the Plains continues, with four states ranking among the top five (but once again, not at the very top).

### Technical Notes

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# SPR

VOLUME 28

ISSUE 6

## In This Issue

### **Index of State Economic Momentum** 2

If what goes up must come down, this Index shows the first signs that natural resource dependent states have finally joined a downturn that has plagued most states for a few years. That said, the weak economic data are nevertheless an improvement over recent quarters; states are still losing income and jobs, but at a slower rate than they have been.

### **More on Personal Income** 6

### **More on Employment** 8

### **Technical Notes** 9

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

**In This Issue**

**Who Pays Business Tax Increases? 2**

As states grapple with balancing their budgets in a very tough economy, the option of raising business taxes will be debated in many places. A recent analysis of the impact of a business tax increase on state residents, workers and owners of capital informs that debate. It also highlights differences among the states in their ability to export a business tax increase.

**A Curious Set of State Rankings 4**

A popular Internet site recently waded into the ranking business by assessing the outlook for state economies in the coming years. The problem is that the methodology used in the analysis is difficult to replicate in a way that confirms the published results. Moreover, the data for one of the three components of the analysis appear to be incorrect.

**AMT Coverage by State 8**

When Congress makes its annual tweak to the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT), it helps some states more than others.

**Technical Notes 9**

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# SPR

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ISSUE 8

## In This Issue

### **Measuring States' Ability to Support Physical Activity 2**

A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds that many states do not have the measures in place to support recommended levels of physical activity. The report identifies where states have been successful and where more work is needed. To help states achieve the desired results, it provides strategies for improvement.

### **Technical Notes 9**

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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ISSUE 9

## In This Issue

### **Public Employment: The Next Shoe to Drop? 2**

Largely because of fiscal assistance provided by the federal government, job losses in state government have been much lower than those in the private sector. As that federal aid comes to an end, the prospect for public sector job losses increases dramatically, unless a) federal aid is extended or b) there is a sudden and swift improvement in state tax collections. At the same time, a recent study questions whether state and local government employees have it so much better than their private sector counterparts.

### **How Federal Aid Could Help 6**

Proposals for extending federal fiscal assistance to states have been plentiful, but the prospect for actually enacting such an extension has gone from a sure thing to anyone's bet.

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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ISSUE 10

## In This Issue

### **Continuum of State Fiscal Stress 2**

Watching states move along the Continuum of State Fiscal Stress is like watching a pendulum: four years ago virtually all of the states ranked in the top two categories, and as the economy deteriorated they began to shift through the middle and into the bottom two groups. It now appears that fiscal year 2010 could be another year of transition, with states having trimmed their spending and their revenue estimates enough to restore a semblance of stability. What is unknown, and unknowable, is how many more years will pass before the pendulum completes the cycle.

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

**In This Issue**

**Is Soda the New Tobacco? 2**

It looked for a minute there as if states might begin to treat sodas and other sugar-sweetened drinks in the same way they treat tobacco: as a threat to public health that should be taxed to both discourage consumption and fund treatment of related health conditions. It didn't turn out that way, at least not yet.

**What Washington Doesn't Know About State Budgeting 3**

As soon as word got out that state revenues recorded an increase in the first quarter of 2010, some on Capitol Hill leapt to the conclusion that all is well with state budgets. However, states are spending less today than they were two years ago, so they have only begun to climb out of a deep hole.

**The Good News on Revenues 5**

Yes, state tax collections have moved into positive territory. No, it doesn't mean states are out of the woods.

**Technical Notes 7**

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# SPR

VOLUME 28

ISSUE 12

## In This Issue

### **Index of State Economic Momentum 2**

This update of the index presents mixed good news for states. On the one hand, personal income growth is positive for the first time in several quarters, and employment changes are on the verge of being positive. On the other hand, some of the recent improvement in personal incomes is attributable to funding provided to states and individuals through the economic recovery act. Inasmuch as funding from that legislation is winding down, there could be some clouds forming on the horizon.

### **ARRA and Personal Income 6**

### **State Unemployment Rates 8**

### **Technical Notes 9**

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**June 2010**

# SPR

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ISSUE 13

## In This Issue

### **Population Shifts Over Time** **2**

The 2010 census, which is currently underway, underscores the importance of a state's population count in allocating federal funds. The past decade has seen widely variable shifts in population, with the South and West gaining shares while the Northeast and Midwest lose.

### **Social Security: A Very Big Safety Net** **7**

There have not been any serious proposals offered to reduce the size of the Social Security program. A recent analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities seems intended to keep it that way.

### **Technical Notes** **9**

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ISSUE 14

## In This Issue

### The Rockefeller Institute Reports on:

**Public Employment** 3

**State Tax Collections** 5

The Rockefeller Institute recently summarized and analyzed data from the second quarter of 2010 (April-June) on public employment and state tax collections. With respect to the former, it finds 31 states have trimmed their workforces, signaling a delayed but widespread response to continuing budget woes. On the tax side, 30 states recorded positive growth in their tax collections, a good result tempered by the fact that the base to which current collections are being compared was itself quite low.

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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JOINT ISSUE 15-16

## In This Issue

### **Federal Spending in the States** 2

The U.S. Bureau of the Census released its report for fiscal year (FY) 2009 that tracks the flow of federal funds to the states. States can use the report to assess how they fare in their fiscal relationship with the federal government.

### **Total Federal Spending** 4

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### **Drawing Inside the Lines** 2

States are about to receive new population counts that are based on the 2010 census. Once they get the counts, they will set about redrawing congressional and state legislative districts. While technology has made the technical aspects of redrawing much easier, the political aspects are as challenging as ever.

### **Falling Fatalities** 5

For whatever reason, motor vehicle fatalities fell dramatically in 2009 to their lowest level since 1950.

### **Technical Notes** 7

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# SPR

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ISSUE 18

## In This Issue

### **Index of State Economic Momentum** 2

This update of the index shows continuing improvement in the national and state economies. Personal income growth is positive in all but two states, employment growth is spreading to more states and unemployment rates are going down in some states, even as the national rate remains more-or-less stalled. States continue to see the positive effects of the recovery act in these critical economic indicators.

### **State Unemployment Rates** 6

### **Technical Notes** 7

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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### **Rainy Day Funds: If Not Now, When? 2**

A cursory glance at state balances suggests that a reasonable level of funding remains in them, even as states have made deep spending cuts and raised taxes. Have states been loath to use their rainy day funds? If so, why? And what might be done to either increase the likelihood of the funds being spent, or—failing that—to minimize the damage that comes from state budget cuts and tax increases in the midst of a recession?

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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## In This Issue

### **Business Tax Climate $\neq$ Business Climate** **2**

In its recently released *2011 State Business Tax Climate Index*, the Tax Foundation assesses five major state business taxes. States that do not levy a personal income tax fare particularly well in the study, as this tax is weighted most heavily in the analysis. The study ignores the important question of how taxes are spent in each state, which has important implications for any state's overall business climate. This omission makes it important to view the analysis in the narrow terms of business *tax* climate, which is something altogether different than business climate.

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# STATE POLICY REPORTS

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ISSUE 21

## In This Issue

### **Poverty-Focused Tax Relief** 2

The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) would like states to improve their tax systems with regard to the treatment of low-income residents. However, its recommendations come at a time when states are not well-positioned to provide much tax relief to anyone.

### **The Short and Useful Life of BABs** 4

The Build America Bond (BAB) program was born of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and came with an expiration date of December 31, 2010. In its short life, it proved very useful to most states. Its demise will probably raise borrowing costs, but also may be a harbinger of more significant changes in the tax-exempt market.

### **Technical Notes** 9

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## In This Issue

### **Deficit Reduction on the Brain (and the Agenda) 2**

Even before the November 2010 elections, there was a palpable sense that the focus of the federal budget was about to shift from economic recovery to deficit reduction. The issuance of two major deficit-reduction proposals has added fuel to the deficit-reduction fire, and the coming months are expected to see actual policy proposals that mirror some of the suggestions in those two reports. The stakes are high for states, as the tax reforms included in the proposals, as well as their spending-reduction options, would have significant impacts on state budgets.

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**November 2010**

# SPR

VOLUME 28

JOINT ISSUE 23-24

## In This Issue

### A Nascent Recovery

A year ago *Reports* was eating crow. Having declared that fiscal year (FY) 2008 was as bad as it could possibly get, the data for FY 2009 proved that it could get worse. This year things look better. The economy is growing, jobs are being created and state fiscal conditions are improving. Risks remain, primarily in the form of the federal government, which is in the process of weaning states from the additional federal assistance it provided as part of the economic recovery program. On top of that, the growing preoccupation with taming the federal budget deficit puts states at continued risk through the remainder of this fiscal year and going forward. So the question now becomes whether the good news reported here is real, or just a hiccup before the next wave of bad news hits.

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**Continuum of State Fiscal Stress** 8

**Technical Notes** 15

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