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The Once and Future Queen of Conservatism

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Thatcher's vision ascendant on both sides of the Atlantic

LONDON

On Friday evening, a tall, bespectacled 30-ish Englishman, Matthew Elliott, escorted Lady Margaret Thatcher into a reception at London's 800-year-old Guild Hall. Despite the fact that England is going through its worst economic crisis since Mrs. Thatcher became prime minister more than three decades ago, she was of good cheer as she conversed with those of us who had come to pay our respects. Perhaps a reason for her upbeat manner was that the ideas she (and Ronald Reagan in the United States) championed are once again gaining currency. Equally important, a new generation of leaders is rising in Britain, including Mr. Elliott, who not only intellectually understand the importance of limited government and free markets but, like Mrs. Thatcher, do not back down in the face of opposition from the establishment statisticians.

Six years ago, Andrew Allum, Florence Heath and Mr. Elliott founded the Taxpayers' Alliance (TPA) with the goal of reducing taxes and the size of government in Britain. Through the use of new media, including the production of several devastatingly hilarious videos of the tax-and-spend excesses of the British government, and the publication of a number of very sound and persuasive papers about governmental abuse, the TPA already has made a major impact on the political scene, including a role in the recent defeat of Prime Minister Gordon Brown. One of the TPA's papers documents how taxpayer monies have been siphoned off to support labor and other organizations for the purpose of lobbying for higher taxes and bigger government. In other words, the poor taxpayer is being forced to pay for his or her own fleecing.

Some of this misuse of taxpayer funds to support higher taxes and spending occurs in the United States, but the statist and union thugs who control the political establishment in Britain appeared to have turned it into a higher art form - at least until Mr. Elliott and his colleagues came along. Last week, under Mr. Elliott's leadership, the TPA sponsored a conference whose participants included leaders of think tanks in Austria, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Lithuania, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States and other countries. The event culminated in a

glorious and uplifting Friday-evening banquet at the Guild Hall. The distinguished economist Arthur Laffer - the most famous father of supply-side economics, who was an adviser to both President Reagan and Mrs. Thatcher during their years in power - gave the keynote address with the same zest and humor as in decades past.

The good news is that those who believe in limited government and free markets are energized in both the United States and Europe. The bad news is that even the reform governments, such as the new British government, so far have not been sufficiently bold to do what needs to be done.

While liberty, free markets and entrepreneurship were being celebrated in Britain, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius warned the insurance industry that the administration would not tolerate blaming premium increases on the new health care law. Specifically, she wrote: "There will be zero tolerance for this type of misinformation and unjustified rate increases." At the same time, other U.S. government agencies were admitting that the health care bill would increase, rather than decrease, medical costs - as critics had been saying all along. Mrs. Sebelius has shown that she is either ignorant of the Constitution - which guarantees freedom of speech - or does not think the basic law of the land is important. During the health care debate, she and her colleagues in the administration consistently prevaricated about what the bill would and would not do and what it would cost.

Mrs. Sebelius probably will not be sacked because the leader of the administration seems to be perfectly comfortable with describing a fantasyland that has no resemblance to the world most people inhabit. He tells us his economic program is "working" despite the fact that more people have been losing, rather than gaining, jobs in recent months and that economic growth has been declining, despite administration forecasts to the contrary. The president keeps demanding that those who create most of the jobs - people making more than \$200,000 a year - be taxed more heavily, which, as most people understand, reduces their ability and incentive to create jobs.

Matthew Elliott in Britain, like the leaders of limited-government organizations in other countries, once again reminds us that the truth-teller without formal power or office can, despite limited resources, curb those in government who have little regard for facts and freedom. Oh, by the way, Mrs. Sebelius, many of us have zero tolerance for the misinformation and unjustified tax increases that ooze from your administration - and we intend to continue to say so.

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