

Milton Friedman: A Hero of Freedom

Milton Friedman was honored by President Bush at a White House ceremony on May 9, in celebration of his approaching 90th birthday. Following are the president's remarks from that ceremony.

It's an honor for me to be here to pay tribute to a hero of freedom, Milton Friedman. He has used a brilliant mind to advance a moral vision: the vision of a society where men and women are free, free to choose, but where government is not as free to override their decisions.

That vision has changed America and it is changing the world. All of us owe a tremendous debt to this man's towering intellect and his devotion to liberty.

Milton Friedman has shown us that when government attempts to substitute its own judgments for the judgments of free people, the results are usually disastrous. In contrast to the free market's invisible hand, which improves the lives of people, the government's invisible foot tramples on people's hopes and destroys their dreams.

He has never claimed that free markets are perfect. Yet he has demonstrated that even an imperfect market produces better results than arrogant experts and grasping bureaucrats. But Milton Friedman does not object to government controls solely because they are ineffective. His deeper objections flow from a moral framework. He has taught us that a free-market system's main justification is its moral strength. Human freedom serves the cause of human dignity. Freedom rewards creativity and work, and you cannot reduce freedom in our economy without reducing freedom in our lives.

As Milton Friedman has written, "I know of no society that has been marked by a large measure of political freedom, and that has not also used something comparable to a free market to organize the bulk of economic activity." This viewpoint was once controversial, as was Milton Friedman, himself.

When he began his work, the conventional wisdom held that capitalism's days

were numbered. Free-market systems were thought to be unsuited to modern problems. Today we recognize that free markets are the great engines of economic development. They are the source of wealth, and the hope of a world weary of poverty and weary of oppression.

We have seen Milton Friedman's ideas at work in Chile, where a group of econ-



President Bush and Rose Friedman listen as Milton Friedman addresses the audience at the White House ceremony in his honor.

omists called the "Chicago Boys" brought inflation under control and laid the groundwork for economic success. We have seen them at work in Russia, where the government recently adopted a 13 percent flat tax with impressive results. We have seen them at work in Sweden, which has adopted personal retirement accounts. We have seen them at work even in China, where the government conceded long ago that Marxism was, in their words, "no longer suited" to China's problems.

These are extraordinary developments. They demonstrate that the rest of the world is finally catching up with Milton Friedman.

Yet Milton Friedman has done more than defend freedom as an abstract ideal. He has creatively applied the power of freedom to the problems of our own country, and in the process he has become an influential social reformer.

Milton has shown us how freedom can enhance our national security. He is the intellectual godfather of our all-volunteer

Army. He argued that America could rely on the dedication of soldiers who serve in the armed forces of their own free will—and he was right. We have recently seen the quality and idealism and skill of the all-volunteer Army. Those who serve our country by choice are serving it with honor.

Milton Friedman has also shown us how freedom can foster educational reform. For many years, he has been a tireless advocate of school choice as a way of empowering parents and improving the performance of our schools. Educational reform advances when parents have the information and the authority to push for reform. And there is no greater authority than a good alternative. Poor children in America need better options when they're trapped in schools that will not teach and will not change.

In all of these issues and debates, Milton Friedman has argued with consistency and courage, and trademark bluntness. His ideas have influence around the world. And by his strength of conviction, he has served his country with distinction.

And it has been recognized as such—after all, he received the 1976 Nobel Prize for Economics, and in 1988 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

In 1938, Milton Friedman married Rose Director, an outstanding economist in her own right—and the only person known to have ever won an argument with Milton. Half a century later, Milton and Rose Friedman published a joint memoir called *Two Lucky People*. There's no doubt that Milton and Rose Friedman have been lucky. But not as lucky as America. We're lucky that their parents chose to immigrate from Europe. We're lucky they gave them the love and encouragement they needed to be bold and to succeed.

We're lucky that Milton Friedman flunked some of his qualifying exams to become an actuary and became an economist, instead. We're thankful for those tough exams but not nearly as thankful as we are for the lives and talents and intellect of Milton and Rose Friedman. ■