

The Oregon Catalyst

Tom Palmer coming to Portland Nov. 3

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by Eric Shierman

There are many people out there who leave all manner of comments under blogs like these, but never go out to a real event, put on by a real organization, to listen live to a real speaker, in the real world. I am all for leveraging information technology to stay informed about the issues while we lead our busy lives, but let's not allow it to crowd out an occasional mingling with people in-person, to shake their hands and look them in the eye as you converse with them rather than simply hit "send."

If you only have the time to go out to one event this year, I would normally recommend the Freedom Seminars, put on every year at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Lake Oswego on a Saturday each November. I wrote about this year's speakers [here](#).

With no disrespect intended for Jacob Hornberger and Jacob Huebert, having just learned that the Cascade Policy Institute has landed the most gifted lecturer on the philosophical arguments for limited government and individual liberty I have ever seen, [Tom Palmer](#), to speak in Portland on November 3rd, I would place this event at the top of your list. For "landed" is the right word. So widely sought as a speaker, Palmer spends more time in the air flying to events around the globe than he does on the ground speaking. Indeed, as a friend of mine on Facebook, I am always getting status updates from him at remote airports.

There simply is nothing out there like Tom Palmer. The last time he spoke in Oregon provides a revealing glimpse at this remarkable man. Before the Bush administration invaded Iraq, redirecting the American left into an anti-war tangent for the next six years, the central focus of progressive politics was the anti-globalization movement. Palmer was invited to speak at Portland State about free trade by its College Republicans. There are not enough College Republicans at PSU to justify a Tom Palmer trip, so I was surprised to hear about it. What I saw was a packed lecture hall full of progressives. A College Republican explained to me that Palmer would come out to speak if they agreed to invite all the left-wing student groups to ask him the tough questions.

Palmer thrives on engagement. He tames hostile audiences with an earnest love of ideas and the sheer depth of his knowledge. After a long Q and A, he invited these students to continue the dialogue over at Hot Lips Pizza at his expense. I followed, not just for free pizza, but to continue taking down notes on his brilliant, off-the-cuff responses to challenging questions. Late into the night he maintained a civil debate with the leaders of Portland State's most extreme left-wing student organizations. One after another, they excused themselves, thanking him for the most engaging conversation that has ever challenged the assumptions of their opinions. But the night did not end there.

The leaders of the College Republicans remained, and I got to watch Palmer challenge their assumptions too. These young Republicans were tripping over themselves to convince Palmer what a cake walk this imminent splendid little war in Iraq would be. Palmer engaged them as deftly as he did the progressives, showing how the rise of a centralized federal government has correlated so closely with the wars it has waged. Invading Iraq will be a disaster he promised them – a disaster for our budget, our security, and more importantly for our liberty. What assumptions of yours might Palmer challenge when he returns to Portland this fall?

Let me offer one of mine. Like most people trained in economics that have made a career in finance, I am philosophically a consequentialist. I embrace individual liberty for its utilitarian

outcome that provides a greater good for the greater number of people. The focus of Tom Palmer's life work has been to challenge this dominant approach with a deontological defense of freedom. For those of you who have never heard of Tom Palmer, a good introduction to him might be a book forum the CATO Institute held last year for Harvard Economist Jeffery Miron, whose book *Libertarianism from A to Z* is as consequentialist as they get. CATO events always seek a dissenting view, and Tom Palmer gave the critical review which you can watch [here](#).

One of the things that I like about the Oregon Catalyst is the presence of progressive comments below its articles. Rather than stew in the stale commentariate of those who agree with one another, this site provides some lively debate. Having followed some of these debates under my articles, I would like to offer some strait talk to some of you whose limited government conclusions I agree with, but whose arguments I cringe to follow. Some of you could use some quality time spent in what Steven Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* referred to as "sharpening the saw."

Fed on an intellectual junk food diet served up at Fox News, some of you would be well served by a more hearty diet from the likes of Tom Palmer. He has edited a monumental book *The Morality of Capitalism* that serves as a compilation of the best arguments for individual liberty that he has encountered on his global travels. [Here](#) is a trailer for his book going viral in the blogosphere now. His book will be released on October 14th priced to sell at only \$8.95. I suggest you have the book read before November 3rd, find something in it that you disagree with, and come to Cascade's event to ask him the most challenging question you can craft.

I would also suggest that you not limit yourself to one event this year; make November your sharpening-the-saw month. You have plenty of advanced notice to clear your calendar and make it out to see both Tom Palmer on November 3rd and the 2011 Freedom Seminar on November 19th. For more information on the Palmer event click [here](#) and this year's Freedom Seminar click [here](#). I hope to see you at both.