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Distinguished pol of the week

By: Jennifer Rubin – May 12, 2013

There were lots of contenders this week. A trio of State Department witnesses showed us the best face of public service. Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) laid out a conservative vision emphasizing community. Democrats, including liberal pundits, implored the president to stand up on Syria. But this week the standout was the team of pro-immigration conservatives who not only carried their case to the public, but also spoke out against one of their own that crossed the line from anti-immigration reform advocacy to disparagement of an entire ethnic group.

Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform, the Cato Institute and Doug Holtz Eakin of the American Action Forum have been the brain trust behind fiscal conservatives' push for immigration reform. They provide testimony, dissect arguments, fund ads and take the case to mainstream and conservative media. But this week they spoke out (with others) in uniform condemnation of a shoddy piece of anti-immigration scholarship by the Heritage Foundation and the anti-immigrant proclamations of one of its authors, Jason Richwine, who contends Hispanics have lower IQ's as a matter of genetics. Heritage had not vetted this person when he was hired and realized its integrity was at stake. By the week's end Richwine was gone.

It was a painful week for Heritage, but they are better without the albatross of a racial determinist, just as jettisoning the John Birch Society decades ago purged the conservative movement of that era's racial cranks. Whatever differences conservatives have on immigration, they should be united on espousing the intrinsic worth of every individual and the ability of any person, from any walk of life, to succeed.

In this effort, ATR/Cato/AAF helped to recast the face of the conservative movement, reasserting modern conservatives' optimistic belief in upward mobility and the American dream. In their minds, no ethnic group is smarter than another. Anyone through diligence, hard work and some smarts can get ahead and improve his life and the American scene. America is an additive society – benefiting from more people, more wealth and more opportunity; America is not a zero-sum game in which perpetually poor people compete for scarce jobs. Conservatism cannot become Malthusian. It must be forward looking and inclusive.

For all that and for reminding conservatives what conservatism really is, we can say well-done, gentlemen.