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OPINION

Mississippi's Capitalist Awakening



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By William McGurn

The 19th century gave us Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," about an American who finds himself in feudal England. The 21st century has given us the reverse: Douglas Carswell, a former member of Parliament who left England five years ago to join a free-market revolution he says will take place in the American South.

Mr. Carswell runs the Mississippi Center for Public Policy, a think tank in Jackson, the state capital. "Why specifically did I want to be in the South?" he asks, then answers:

An Englishman moves to Jackson to become the leader of a free-market think tank.

"If American conservatism has a future, it will speak with a Southern accent. The American South is going to be the epicenter of the great economic, technological and cultural innovations over the coming decades. It already is in many ways.

"The North saved the republic 160 years ago. The Southern example—low taxes, school choice, maximum freedom—will save the U.S. in our lifetime."

Even so, this red state might be an odd choice. Mississippi's heyday was in the antebellum South, when the cotton- and slave-based economy made it a congenial home for wealthy planters and their gracious mansions. But since the end of the Civil War, its economy has languished, becoming a synonym for stagnation and backwardness.

Until now. In 2024, according to the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis, the state registered 4.2% growth in real gross domestic product—making it the second-fastest-growing state in the U.S. Florida and Texas have already become economic powerhouses, but if Mr. Carswell has anything to say about it, poor cousin Mississippi will join them. "We are seeing a manufacturing revival here," he says. "Mississippi today is AI and automated manufacturing."

In a May 27 piece in Jackson's Clarion-Ledger, he rattled off some of the ingredients for Mississippi's growth these past five years: a huge income-tax cut, with a 4% flat tax going into effect in 2026; deregulation that opens up occupational licensing to competition; a government that spends within its means, yielding budget surpluses; and low-cost energy, mainly a result of avoiding the renewable energy subsidies so popular in blue states.

He says the state's biggest achievement in 2025 was



Douglas Carswell

passing legislation to phase out the income tax altogether by 2040. (Progress depends on actual tax collections and spending projections.)

As unlikely as Mississippi may be as the leader of a capitalist revolution, Mr. Carswell may be an even more unlikely leader. Raised in Uganda by a British mother and father who were both physicians, he was a Conservative member of Parliament until he defected to the United Kingdom Independence Party. The great issue then was whether Britain should leave the European Union—and Mr. Carswell says he went into Parliament to get Britain out.

"After we won, I quit," he says. "As an MP I never lost an election, but I came to realize I was in the wrong place. Those in elected politics can only read from the script. I realized that if I really wanted to change things I should be upstream

from elected politics and work for a think tank to help write the script.

"I also realized I was on the wrong side of the Atlantic. If you believe that freedom and liberty are the motor of human progress—the thing that has lifted our species from the swamp to the stars, like Reagan said—then nothing compares to the United States."

Being an outsider may enable Mr. Carswell to see things born-and-bred Mississippians are likely to miss. He points out that Mississippi has already passed the U.K. in per capita GDP and is set to pass Germany any day now.

"Too many people that don't know Mississippi think of it as a river, steamboats and some old guy strumming a banjo on a broken porch," says Mr. Carswell. And, of course, Southeastern Conference football.

In New York, Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani may believe socialism is the future. Down Mr. Carswell's way, Mississippi is carving out a different path. And Mr. Carswell is confident it will prove the superior model—not only for the U.S. but for Britain as well.

"I only wish my former colleagues back in Britain were as open to free-market reform as folk in Mississippi are," he says. "Perhaps Britain now needs to learn some lessons from America—from Southern states like Mississippi in particular."

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