



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux
Chairman, Department of Economics
George Mason University
dboudrea@gmu.edu
<http://www.cafehayek.com>

Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet and may require registration or subscription to access if they are. Some of the original articles are syndicated and therefore may have appeared in other publications also.

29 June 2008

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Given that America supplies the world's single largest share of manufacturing output, Gibert Kaplan's premise that American manufacturing is declining is questionable ("5 Myths About the Death Of the American Factory," June 29). Regardless of the soundness of his premise, though, Mr. Kaplan writes as if foreign governments possess magical powers to conjure resources from thin

air. He insists that foreign-governments' subsidies to manufacturing firms gives producers in those countries unalloyed advantages over private-sector producers in the U.S.

But every euro or yuan paid as a subsidy is a euro or yuan taken from somewhere else in the economy. No firm, industry, or sector can be artificially strengthened without artificially weakening some other firms, industries, or sectors. It's easy to see, for example, how subsidies might enable Airbus to sell more commercial airliners. What's less visible but no

less real is the reduced output and efficiency of those producers who pay higher taxes to finance these subsidies.

28 June 2008

Editor, Washington Times

Dear Editor:

I applaud John McCain's support for free trade ("McCain champions free trade," June 28). It's important, however, that the case for free trade be made properly lest some inevitable consequences of trade be used by protectionists to discredit free-trade's supporters.

Contrary to what some people might interpret as Mr. McCain's meaning, free trade is not justified because - or only so far as - American products and producers can compete "with anybody in any market in the world." With trade, some American producers will indeed compete successfully in foreign markets while many others will continue to serve only domestic consumers. Importantly, some other American producers will be bested by foreign rivals.

One of the great benefits of free trade is that it puts comparatively inefficient producers out of business and, in doing so, releases more resources to be used by comparatively efficient producers.

28 June 2008

Friends,

Karol's op-ed in yesterday's edition of The Guardian is (if I may brag) outstandingly good. In it, she exposes the folly of government-imposed restrictions on the labor market.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jun/27/southafrica.zimbabwe?gusrc=rss&feed=worldnews>

27 June 2008

Editor, New Orleans Times-Picayune

Dear Editor:

The usually thoughtful Eugene Robinson writes that "The practical benefits of effective gun control are obvious: If there are fewer guns, there are fewer shootings and fewer funerals" (June 27). But what's "obvious" at first glance isn't necessarily true.

Much research finds that more guns lead to LESS violent crime. The reason is that would-be violent offenders are less likely to attack persons who might be armed than to attack persons who probably

aren't armed. While the relationship between the breadth of gun ownership and crime is an empirical one - this question cannot be answered purely by abstract reasoning - the "more guns, less crime" thesis is not far-fetched. Persons who doubt it should ask themselves if they believe it possible that crime would rise if guns were taken away from police officers. If they answer "yes," then they must concede the very real possibility that denying guns to law-abiding private persons also raises the crime rate.

26 June 2008

Editor, Washington Times

Dear Editor:

In his letter of June 26, Andy Arnold writes as if Americans are running out of space to use as garbage landfills.

Rubbish.

Clemson University economist Daniel Benjamin, in a 2004 paper prepared for the environmental research organization PERC, reports that "The United States today has more landfill capacity than ever before.... Given that the

total land area needed to hold all of America's garbage for the next century would be only about 10 miles on a side, it is safe to conclude that far more rubbish than is worth considering will fit into far less area than is worth worrying about."

[http://www.environnement-propriete.org/english/2004/2004download_pdf/Benjamin2004.pdf]

Note: I asked Dan Benjamin what landfill depth is assumed in the calculation, reported in his 2004 paper, that "the total land area needed to hold all of America's garbage for the next century would be only about 10 miles on a side." Here's his reply.

"That calculation assumed 300 feet, not unusual for modern landfills. Some are deeper, some shallower. It also assumed about 30 psi for pressures inside the landfill; trucks compress to 60 psi but there is relaxation when trash is dumped. Pressures are obviously higher at bottom than at top."

25 June 2008

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Ralph Peters correctly notes that "capitalism needs adult supervision" ("I'm for McCain, but not the GOP," June 25). He incorrectly presumes, however, that this truth justifies regulation by government.

In market economies consumers, workers, investors, and property owners provide ample adult supervision. If a brewer sells me bad beer, I stop buying his product. Of course, some misbehaviors are less easily punished, but to presume that these difficulties validate government regulation is to presume that government acts as a responsible adult. Can anyone who soberly beholds the behavior of politicians honestly conclude that sufficient numbers of them are mature, wise, responsible, and trustworthy supervisors of anything other than their own vulgar careers?

24 June 2008

Editor, The New York Times
229 West 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

John McCain wants Uncle Sam to offer a prize of

\$300 million to whoever develops an affordable and practical battery package that will reduce the costs of powering automobiles by at least 70 percent ("McCain Proposes a \$300 Million Prize for a Next-Generation Car Battery," June 24). How silly.

Anyone who develops such a device will earn profits dwarfing \$300 million simply by selling it on the market. There's absolutely no need for any such taxpayer-funded prize.

24 June 2008

Editor, The New York Post

Dear Editor:

Rich Lowry hilariously smacks down Senators Kent Conrad and Chris Dodd for claiming not to know that the cut-rate, VIP loans given to them by Countrywide Financial were attempts to buy their influence ("Suffering Senators," June 24). But while any ordinary person would indeed have seen Countrywide's bribe for what it is, maybe - just maybe - these "public servants" really are oblivious to the obvious. As historian Will Durant said about Robespierre at the height of that madman's dominance,

"power demented even more than it corrupts." [Will and Ariel Durant, *The Age of Napoleon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), p. 81]