



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.

31 August 2008

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

Dear Editor:

Saturday Night Live once did a comedy skit called "The Stupid Family." It featured people who accidentally burned themselves on the kitchen stove or drank sour milk, and who, after screaming in pain or disgust, immediately forgot the sources of their distress and committed the identical blunders again. And again. This skit was uproariously funny!

Many political commenters remind me of The Stupid Family. Today's exhibit is Ruth Marcus ("A Heartbeat Away From Cynicism," August 31). She's surprised and disenchanted that John McCain's pick of Sarah Palin as his running mate has a purpose no more lofty than to help him win the election. Why the surprise? What else did Ms. Marcus expect of McCain? He's a politician - and politicians are creatures who routinely say and do whatever they believe will win them the most votes. Surely in her career Ms. Marcus has encountered such self-serving stratagems

countless times. To be offended that McCain's V-P choice is calculated and "cynical" is, well, stupid.

30 August 2008

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

Dear Editor:

From across the country activists have converged on San Francisco for the 'Slow Food Nation' rally ("As Food Becomes a Cause, Meeting Puts Issues on the Table," August 30). These activists insist that consuming non-local foods harms the environment, exploits workers, severs our community ties, and numbs our taste buds.

Overlook the fact that these claims are contradicted by empirical research, and let's get into the rally's spirit, which refuses to be dampened by reason and facts. Start by asking: why reject only non-local foods? Why not also reject non-local news - such as this very report from San Francisco? And why not also reject non-local culture? Surely we Washingtonians would be happier and more in touch with ourselves if we read only novels written by locals such as Christopher Buckley and not those written by the likes of Milan Kundera, Margaret Atwood, or Larry McMurtry.

And what's with the Kennedy Center bringing in performers from outside the Beltway? How much CO2 is unnecessarily emitted into the atmosphere whenever the Kirov Ballet flies in from St. Petersburg or when James Levine comes down from Boston? And how many local artists do we overlook in our thoughtless insistence on seeing non-local acts performed on our local stages?

29 August 2008

Editor, Newsweek

Dear Editor:

Robert Samuelson is correct: regardless of which party wins the White House or Congress, Uncle Sam is unlikely to get his fiscal affairs in order ("The Rise of Fantasy Politics," September 1).

In principle, government's core responsibility is to prevent Jones from benefiting by his imposing costs on Smith without Smith's consent. In practice, government acts as Jones's agent in securing benefits for him by imposing costs on Smith.

Government's modus operandi today is to bestow

goodies on politically powerful interest groups, and to pay for these goodies by taxing politically unpopular groups (e.g., oil companies) and politically impotent groups (notably, future taxpayers). The bottom line is that, through government, Jones imposes costs on Smith without Smith's consent.

28 August 2008

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

Take note of a small item buried in your story about Apple Inc.'s dealings with music producers: "At the start of this year, iTunes became the largest retailer of music in the U.S., surpassing Wal-Mart" ("More Artists Steer Clear of iTunes," August 28).

Remember this fact whenever someone insists that preventing today's 'dominant' firm in some market from crushing competition and harming consumers requires antitrust regulators. Wal-Mart, naively felt by many persons to be 'invincible' because of its large share of the retail market, finds itself today losing market

share in music sales to a process of retailing that's only five years old.

As Joseph Schumpeter pointed out, competition is a sharp, multifaceted, vigorous, creative, and unpredictable process - one that antitrust intervention only dulls and never sharpens.

27 August 2008

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

To the Editor:

David Allan Coe - satirizing country and western music - said that no song could be the perfect C&W song unless it mentioned "mama, trains, trucks, prison, and gettin' drunk." Coe then tells how a songwriter, Steve Goodman, followed this advice and wrote a verse that indeed created "the perfect country and western song." Here it is:

I was drunk the day my mom
Got out of prison

And I went to pick her up
In the rain.

But before I could get to the station in my pick-up truck

She got runned over by a damned old train.

These lyrics came to mind when I read Hillary Clinton's Denver speech. Was she spoofing political oratory in the same way that Coe spoofed C&W songs? Seems so, for how else to explain this hilarious line?

"I will always remember the single mom who had adopted two kids with autism. She didn't have any health insurance, and she discovered she had cancer. But she greeted me with her bald head, painted with my name on it, and asked me to fight for health care for her and her children."

I congratulate Sen. Clinton for her blazingly brilliant satire!

26 August 2008

Mr. Bruce Alan & Mr. Mike Moss, Morning Anchors
WTOP News Radio
Washington, DC

Dear Editor:

You complained today that the prices drivers will have to pay to use some of the soon-to-open toll lanes on

DC-area highways might be burdensomely high. You then asked "What if the congestion on these lanes is as great as on the free lanes? Won't that be an additional burden imposed on drivers paying the high tolls?"

Do you not see the contradiction in your dual concerns? If the toll lanes are indeed highly congested, this fact implies that the tolls aren't much of a burden to many drivers - and, thus, that the tolls should be raised until they actually DO become somewhat burdensome. Only then will they cause drivers to change their driving habits sufficiently to keep congestion from clogging the tolled roads.

26 August 2008

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

According to Berl Hartman, "A recent poll shows that when given a choice, 83 percent of Americans favor investing in clean, renewable energy over increased offshore drilling" (Letters, August 26). How seriously should we take such a poll? Quite seriously IF 83 percent of American investors are actually making such investments - say, managing their 401(k)s to hold more shares of companies experimenting with "clean, renewable energy" and fewer shares of Exxon and other oil and gas corporations.

But such a poll is worthless if the persons surveyed offered only their opinions without having to put any of their own resources on the table. Asking Jones how Smith's money should be invested does not require Jones to consider carefully the difficulties, risks, and potential returns of each of Smith's investment options. Jones's response to this poll question should carry no more weight than would my response to your asking me which sort of printing presses you should

buy: not only do I know nothing about the newspaper business, but because my answer will not affect my wealth, I have incentives neither to learn nor to ponder the issue conscientiously.

25 August 2008

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

Dear Editor:

Perhaps Richard Cohen is correct that some people find the prospect of a Vice-President Joe Biden to be "reassuring" ("Obama's Reassuring Choice," August 25). I, though, am not among these people. I can still see the television images of Sen. Biden waving a copy of Richard Epstein's excellent book "Takings" in front of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, practically demanding that Judge Thomas reject the ideas in that book. Those ideas are that private property rights are indispensable protectors of both prosperity and freedom, and should not be sacrificed to the alleged necessity of government to 'regulate.'

I don't recall Judge Thomas's reply, but I do

recall Sen. Biden's utter - and utterly disgraceful - contempt for what is perhaps the single most important social institution ever to emerge in human society.

25 August 2008

Friends,

I was born and raised in New Orleans, so forgive my unusual interest in the progress of my hometown since those awful days three years ago when the levees broke, drowning the Big Easy. This newly released publication of the Mercatus Center provides an excellent and unique perspective on the rebuilding of the Crescent City:

<http://www.mercatus.org/looknowledge/>

Laissez le rouleau de liberté!

25 August 2008

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

John Goodman is correct (Letters, August 25). Thomas Frank criticizes Milton Friedman's

economics without having any apparent familiarity with what Mr. Friedman actually wrote.

Mr. Frank famously knows not of what he speaks. In his latest book, "The Wrecking Crew," Mr. Frank alleges that "Libertarianism is a politics born to be subsidized." Ignore the fact that "libertarianism" is less a politics than a centuries-old tradition of ideas featuring contributions by infamous corporate shills such as the English Levellers of the 17th century, John Locke, and James Madison.

Instead ask: Isn't it just a wee bit unrealistic to suppose that corporations eagerly rain money down on thinkers who steadfastly oppose tariffs and other import restrictions which protect corporations from foreign competition? Who object to all subsidies for businesses? Who oppose occupational licensing that shields incumbent producers from upstart rivals? Who fight vigorously against using eminent-domain powers to transfer property to private corporations? Who led the intellectual charge that abolished the slavery of military conscription in America? Who object strenuously to the military-

industrial complex? Who spend much time and effort arguing for complete drug legalization? Who support gay marriage?