



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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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.

4 January 2009

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

Dear Editor:

George Will nicely explains how the 1971 ruling in *Griggs v. Duke Power* is an example of the law of unintended consequences at work ("The Toll of a Rights 'Victory,'" January 4). Another point deserves mention, though.

The market share of, and the rates charged by, defendant Duke Power were regulated by government. Moreover, these regulated rates were

based on the Company's costs; higher costs meant higher permitted rates, and vice versa. So it's unsurprising that Duke Power practiced racial discrimination in hiring: failure to use the most productive workers cost it very little, for the higher costs resulting from sacrificing worker productivity in order to satisfy its preference for white workers were recovered through higher regulated rates.

In contrast, firms regulated by market competition pay dearly if they discriminate in favor of racially preferred but less-productive workers, for the resulting

higher costs cannot be recovered through government-set higher prices.

3 January 2009

Editor, Chicago Tribune

Dear Editor:

President-elect Obama prescribes fiscal "stimulus" as the cure for America's ailing economy ("Obama urges Congress to approve economic recovery plan quickly, support bold investment," January 3). Well let's see.

With the exception of a few years during the Clinton administration, the U.S.

has run budget deficits continuously for the past four decades. And from 2002 through 2008, Uncle Sam ran budget deficits each year, totaling \$2.13 TRILLION dollars. That's a frightful amount of fiscal stimulus, and yet the economy today is struggling.

Now with the bailout, the budget deficit for 2009 alone is projected to be close to \$1 trillion - nearly seven percent of GDP - a figure much higher than at any time since WWII. If deficit spending were good for the economy, Americans would now be, not on shaky grounds, but in Shangri-la.

1 January 2009

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

Dear Editor:

David Bell writes that "Rather than buying a gun to protect ourselves and our flat-screen TVs from our less-fortunate neighbors, we could forgo buying the gun, sell the flat-screen TV and use the proceeds to help the neighbors" (Letters, January 1).

While there's nothing wrong in principle with helping others, Mr. Bell misses an important part of the reality justifying gun ownership. Persons willing to commit violence while stealing the likes of consumer electronics elicit from their potential victims, not a sense of charity, but a sense of self-preservation.
Understandably so.

31 December 2008

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

To the Editor:

Your case against the F.T.C.'s opposition to Whole Foods' merger with Wild Oats is 100 percent economically wholesome ("Whole Foods Fiasco," December 31).

Before the antitrustinistas batter us further with their self-righteous restrictions, I challenge them to present a single compelling instance of an actual merger that resulted in consumer harm. Just one.

I've studied business and antitrust history for many years and can think of not one such case. Given the paucity (to put it mildly) of evidence that free-market mergers harm consumers, it's grotesque that bureaucrats who know only textbook models are statutorily armed to prevent private entrepreneurs from experimenting with different ways to enhance efficiencies.

29 December 2008

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

To the Editor:

Like many people, Ben Stein was assured that Bernard Madoff "never lost money" ("They Told Me That Madoff Never Lost Money," December 28). Unlike many people, Ben Stein wisely understood this assurance to be nonsense.

Americans should apply Mr. Stein's wisdom to the greatest Ponzi scheme going: Social Security. Many pols and pundits assure us that this program is a great financial deal for ordinary Americans. But in principle Social Security is identical to Mr. Madoff's fraudulent scheme: rather than generate wealth through productive investments, both schemes transfer wealth from newer 'investors' to older 'investors.' As long as a sufficient number of newer 'investors' keep coming aboard - either by being duped a la Mr. Madoff or by being coerced a la Social Security - such schemes appear brilliant. This appearance, however, is a dangerous apparition.

27 December 2008

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

To the Editor:

Re "The World According to Cheney" (December 23): You openly regard the Bush administration as an unalloyed catastrophe. And you're sure that the Obama administration will be much better. I agree about Bush; I disagree about Obama.

But even if I agreed that Mr. Obama will bestow upon America countless blessings, I would still forgo those blessings in exchange for a radical reduction in government's power and size. One reason is that I value individual freedom as an end in itself. A second reason - one more prudential - is that a system that so routinely dysfunctions by giving us the likes of Bush-Cheney (and Nixon-Agnew, and Tom DeLay, and you-name-your-favorite curs) is untrustworthy.

Just as, say, the stability and peace of mind that monogamy offers married couples are worth the

sacrifice of the ecstasies anticipated from secret affairs with unusually attractive seducers, the stability and peace of mind that limited government offers society is worth the sacrifice of whatever ecstasies are anticipated from an unusually attractive "leader."

23 December 2008

Editor, Washington Times

Dear Editor:

Former Reagan administration official John Block begins his letter to the editor with this sentence: "As a former secretary of the Agriculture Department, I have seen the remarkable contributions that Congress and the executive branch have made when it comes to addressing global hunger and feeding millions of hungry people across the world" (Letters, December 23).

Puuulleese.

The overriding goal of the Department of Agriculture - a goal instilled in it repeatedly by various Congresses and Presidents - is nothing more noble than to transfer wealth to American farmers. And one of the

major tools it uses to achieve this goal is paying farmers to REDUCE agricultural outputs, thus resulting in higher food prices. Bureaucrats and politicians who implement policies that make many foods scarcer than they would otherwise be cannot legitimately be hailed as great benefactors of the world's hungry masses.

22 December 2008

Friends,

Here's a piece I have in the December 23 Christian Science Monitor on a now-infamous Illinois governor and a famous (but not nearly enough so) Virginia School economist:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/1223/p09s01-coop.html>

22 December 2008

Editor, WTOP Radio
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

One of your morning anchors, arguing in favor of appointing someone to fill the Senate seat vacated by Barack Obama, worries that a special election "would take too much time."

Yes, a special election cannot be done as quickly as can an appointment. But so what? That Senate seat has already been practically empty for the past two years, as Mr. Obama was crisscrossing the country campaigning for an even higher office. (Ditto, by the way, for Mrs. Clinton's Senate seat.) Clearly, having any member of the comically called "world's greatest deliberative body" actually be present IN this august assembly is not so very important after all.