



## 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.**

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26 July 2009

Editor, The New York Times  
620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

The opening paragraph of your news report on the Justice Department's efforts to intensify antitrust regulation reveals - dare I say it - the sort of left-liberal bias that you are accused of. To wit - "President Obama's top antitrust official and some senior Democratic lawmakers are preparing to rein in a host of major industries, including airline and railroad giants"

("Antitrust Chief Hits Resistance in Crackdown," July 26).

By writing "rein in a host of major industries," you simply presume that the industries in question are in fact stampeding over innocent Americans - that these industries need reining in - and that antitrust regulation is an effective rein. These presumptions, though, blithely brush aside some major contentions of advocates of free markets, such as that competition in reality is far more vigorous, robust, and multi-faceted than it is in textbooks, and that antitrust has too often been used to stymie rather

than promote competition. What to many people on the left looks like out-of-control anticompetitive behavior is plausibly seen by other persons to be, in fact, the competitive actions of businesses ever-aware that any market advantage, no matter how great, is inevitably fleeting. And what to many people on the left looks like socially beneficial government regulation is plausibly seen by other persons to be, in fact, devious devices to benefit the few at the expense of the many.

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26 July 2009

Editor, Baltimore Sun

Dear Editor:

Rev. Ken Brooker-Langston applauds the increase in the national minimum wage - rising today from \$6.55 to \$7.25 per hour ("A step on the path to economic justice," July 26). He asserts that this increase boosts "more than 2 million hardworking employees one step up the ladder of economic opportunity."

Many economists, including me, have a very different take. The sad reality that we see is that Uncle Sam has arbitrarily raised the cost of hiring low-skilled workers by 10.7 percent - meaning that fewer jobs for such workers will be created, swelling the pool of the unemployed.

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25 July 2009

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

James Donlon is correct: when commenting on the arrest of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Pres. Obama should have stopped after he said that he didn't "have all the facts" (Letters, July 25). Unfortunately, such modesty is foreign to the nature of homo politicianus.

A modern politician wins office by duping voters into believing that he possesses superhuman abilities to empathize with strangers ("I feel your pain"), to become expert at countless diverse tasks (witness Mr. Obama's flitting from saving the global environment in the morning to overhauling the entire American health-care system in the afternoon, all in between meetings with foreign 'leaders' and telephone calls to Major League baseball players), and, in general, to change the world for the better by intervening from on high, much like God is believed to intercede benevolently from the heavens whenever the deserving faithful plead to him for relief from reality.

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24 July 2009

Editor, The New York Times  
620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

I'm surprised that Paul Krugman points to Massachusetts's three-year-old program for creating universal health-insurance coverage in that state as a model for the

national level ("Costs and Compassion," July 24). Krugman himself admits - in a column devoted to insisting that such government plans will reduce health-care costs - that Massachusetts "is now looking for ways to help control costs." If Massachusetts's experience is Mr. Krugman's best real-world case for how such reform itself controls costs, why are legislators in that state "now looking" - three years later - "for ways to help control costs"?

But control costs they must. A 2008 Kaiser Family Foundation study of this Massachusetts reform finds that "the costs for this program have exceeded previous estimates. The Governor's budget request of \$869 million for 2009 is about \$400 million more than that for 2008, and it is believed that this funding level may still fall short." [<http://www.kff.org/uninsured/7777.cfm>] And just last month, Cato Institute scholar Michael Tanner reported that "since the program became law, insurance premiums have been increasing by 10 to 12 percent per year, nearly double the national average. On average, health insurance costs \$16,897 a year for a family

of four in Massachusetts, compared to \$12,700 nationally. Meanwhile, total health-care spending in the state has increased by 28 percent."

[\[http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=10279\]](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10279)

23 July 2009

Editor, The New York Times  
620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

If an armed man breaks into your house, confiscates money from your wallet, insists that he and his goons are blessed with a grand vision of how you and your family should be provided with health care, and commands you to do as he orders, would you believe his promise to keep armed intruders "out of health care decisions"? ("Text: Obama's Remarks on Health Care," July 22).

Of course not.

So why isn't the entire country furious at being insulted by Pres. Obama's patently absurd claim that his efforts to give government a greater role in paying for health care will "keep government out of health care decisions"?

22 July 2009

Friends,

Should Americans "buy American"? As this 9+ minute-long video from Reason.TV (and the incomparable Nick Gillespie and Ted Balaker) explains, to do so is (1) much more difficult than you think, and (2) stupid. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWQ\\_UV-9Wb4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWQ_UV-9Wb4)

(Warning: occasionally the flow of the video is disturbed by yours truly.)

22 July 2009

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Jan Schoo argues that governments should not be motivated by higher revenue - that the quest for "the almighty dollar" is corrupting (Letters, July 22). Monetary motivation does indeed often lead governments to behave disgracefully, but history provides some instructional exceptions to this rule.

For example, efficient and inexpensive general incorporation statutes emerged in the U.S. during the 19th century as state governments competed against each other to

attract entrepreneurs to incorporate companies in these governments' respective jurisdictions. Without this competition, which was sparked by state-governments' quests for more tax revenues, companies seeking to incorporate might still have to lobby legislatures for the privilege of incorporating. [Henry N. Butler, "Nineteenth-Century Jurisdictional Competition in the Granting of Corporate Privileges," Journal of Legal Studies, Vol. 14, January 1985, pp. 129-166] The result would have been not only government corruption in dispensing (and withholding) permission to incorporate, but also many fewer corporations - and, hence, a less competitive economy.

Ultimately, the problem with government isn't that it is too often motivated by money but, rather, that its power to order people about is too often unchecked.

21 July 2009

Editor, Baltimore Sun

Dear Editor:

Michael Cross-Barnet makes clear that he truly is "the mad recycler" - a man

obsessed with finding used materials and sending them off to be recycled ("Bin there, done that," July 21). And he wants the rest of us to share his enthusiasm for recycling all materials that can physically be recycled.

Alas, I cannot. You see, recycling consumes the one resource that is most valuable in modern society: human labor. Time spent recycling is time diverted from producing, pondering, parenting, pleasuring, even relaxing - which is necessary to make our lives worth living and to refresh our productive capacities. Too many advocates of recycling, such as Mr. Cross-Barnet, unthinkingly presume that a pound of plastic or a pack of newsprint is more valuable than is the human labor and time (and other resources) necessary to do this recycling.

Unlike Mr. Cross-Barnet, I refuse mindlessly waste resources mindlessly - especially the ultimate resource that is human labor.

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20 July 2009

Editor, The New York Times Book Review  
620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

Favorably reviewing Ellen Ruppel Shell's "Cheap," ("Nothing for Nothing," July 19) Laura Shapiro says that "raising the wages of a worker in Mexico by 30 percent would add only 1.2 percent to the price of a shirt - that's 24 cents on a \$20 shirt. Most companies won't hear of it. Cost-cutting is the only value they recognize, in part because profit margins are so narrow that companies can't afford to compete on any basis except ever-lower prices. An American dream once fueled by ideas and entrepreneurship has been reduced to laying off workers and reducing risk."

This paragraph features rich layers of economic nonsense. Here's one: IF a firm would arbitrarily raise its workers' pay by 30 percent above market, its profits would disappear, as Ruppel Shell and Shapiro apparently understand. But what both author and reviewer do not understand is that workers would then be laid off in droves. Far from promoting worker layoffs, paying market-determined wages keeps such layoffs to a minimum.