



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.

23 August 2009

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

Dear Editor:

Reviewing Adrian Goldsworthy's book on the decline of ancient Rome, Diana Preston notes that "Goldsworthy completed his book before the real extent of the world's current financial crisis was known, but he quotes a complaint by the Emperor Diocletian that seems especially relevant and shows that human nature may not have changed much since Roman times: 'There burns a raging

greed, which hastens to its own growth and increase without respect for human kind.' Goldsworthy sensibly concludes there's nothing to suggest the United States must inevitably decline, but that it's up to those at the top - our 21st-century emperors - to ensure it doesn't" ("Rome Wasn't Destroyed in a Day Either," August 23).

How ironic to quote Diocletian - a rapacious hypocrite whose reign can serve as an ideal lesson in why bestowing power and glory on 'leaders' is a fool's game. According to the Roman philosopher Lactantius, under

Diocletian "tax collectors began to outnumber taxpayers, and, after exorbitant taxation sapped their initiative, farmers abandoned their farms and plowed fields grew up into woods. In a policy of terrorization the provinces were cut up into scraps, a multitude of governors and hordes of directors oppressed every region - almost every city; and to these were added countless collectors and secretaries and assistants to the directors. Judges seldom had civil cases before them: they tried (not frequently, but incessantly) condemnations, confiscations, and requisitions of every kind of

property, and unbearable inequities in the imposition of taxes.... Diocletian's boundless greed would never allow his own treasury to be tapped, so he constantly piled on new taxes and contributions in order to keep his personal hoard intact."

[\[http://www.thefreemanonline.org/columns/roots-of-economic-understanding/#_edn6\]](http://www.thefreemanonline.org/columns/roots-of-economic-understanding/#_edn6)

Beware whenever those with power pompously decry the 'greed' of others.

23 August 2009

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Harris Gruman criticizes those citizens of Massachusetts who, resenting Massachusetts newly raised sales tax, shop in New Hampshire (Letters, August 23). Mr. Gruman asks "Where's the resentment over high credit card fees and interest rates, double-digit increases in insurance premiums, and paying good money for shoddy products?"

The answer to this question should be obvious. Apart from some insurance coverage that government requires people to buy, a third party neither officiously intrudes into these voluntary transactions between buyers and sellers nor confiscates part of the proceeds.

What is worthy of resentment is not the set of choices voluntarily offered on markets but the arrogant use of force by government.

23 August 2009

Friends,

In today's Richmond Times-Dispatch, I argue against the crazy idea that now is a good time to raise taxes in Virginia. Cut 'em, I say!

http://www2.timesdispatch.com/rtd/news/opinion/commentary/article/ED-BOUD23_20090821-202407/287528/

22 August 2009

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

To the Editor:

Suggesting that President Herbert Hoover followed laissez-faire policies, David Leonhart writes that "we can't rerun the past year with a Hooverite economic strategy" to see what its outcome would have been ("Theory and Morality in the New Economy," August 19)

No need to do so, for the past year WAS run "with a Hooverite economic strategy." From Pres. Hoover's 52 percent increase in government spending to his running the third-largest budget deficit then in U.S. history - and

from his creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to his signing of the Federal Home Loan Bank Act - Hoover's hyperactive intervention nearly 80 years ago was not very different from Bush's and Obama's hyperactive interventions today. Hoover himself, campaigning for re-election in October 1932, bragged of rejecting the advice of "reactionary economists [who] urged that we should allow the liquidation to take its course until it had found its own bottom."

[\[http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=23269&st=&st1\]](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=23269&st=&st1)

22 August 2009

Editor, Baltimore Sun

Dear Editor:

Jerrold Brotman is right to worry that government-run health care will be no more efficient than the U.S. Postal Service (Letters, August 22).

Worker productivity today is four times greater than it was at the end of World War II, and - with the advent of the jet engine, the Interstate Highway system, and other advances in transportation technologies - transportation costs are

much lower. So a postal service run with even a smidgen of responsiveness to consumer demands would today supply its services more efficiently and, hence, at lower costs.

Alas, however, the inflation-adjusted price of a first-class stamp is today 22 percent HIGHER than it was in 1945.

21 August 2009

Friends,

Here's a fascinating podcast with my colleague Tyler Cowen on his new book Create Your Own Economy. Cato's Caleb Brown does a fine job interviewing Tyler.

http://ne.edgecastcdn.net/000873/dailypodcast/tylercowen_createyourowneconomy_20090820.mp3

21 August 2009

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

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman sings the alleged praises of a "public-option" health-insurance plan: "it would introduce more competition and keep premiums down"

("Obama's Trust Problem," August 21).

If Mr. Krugman is correct, he should also endorse a "public-option" newspaper - say, the "New York Times Two." Such a publication, according to Mr. Krugman's reasoning, would introduce more competition into the newspaper business and keep advertising and subscription rates down.

Of course, Mr. Krugman might object that government cannot be trusted with a task so important as newspaper reporting and opinionating; he might legitimately worry that newspapers would become infected with the virus of politics. But if so, why is he so confident that a "public option" health insurer would not further infect health-care markets with the virus of politics?

21 August 2009

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

To the Editor:

Fred Hochberg, President of the Export-Import Bank of the U.S., says proudly that "the mandate of the Export-Import Bank of the U.S. (Ex-Im Bank) is to

help create and sustain U.S. jobs by financing U.S. exports" (Letters, August 21). I've some questions - and answers - for Mr. Hochberg.

From where does the Ex-Im Bank get the dollars it spends to subsidize U.S. exports? (Answer: taxpayers.) Would taxpayers not spend or invest these dollars if these dollars were not taxed away? (Answer: of course they would.) Would not this spending and investing by less-onerously-taxed Americans not "help create and sustain U.S. jobs"? (Answer: of course it would.) Is there anything particularly desirable about a job producing and selling output for export as opposed to a job producing and selling output for domestic consumption? (Answer: nope.) Can you spend money more wisely than it can be spent by the taxpayers from whom it is confiscated? (Answer: no; you almost surely spend it less wisely.)

So AT BEST the Ex-Im Bank creates jobs in export industries by destroying jobs in non-exporting industries. Final question, then: Why does the Ex-Im exist?

19 August 2009

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

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman writes that "In Britain, the government itself runs the hospitals and employs the doctors. We've all heard scare stories about how that works in practice; these stories are false" ("The Swiss Menace," August 19).

Curious. Here's what Arthur Seldon, an English economist, wrote in 1998 about his country's National Health Service: "The characteristic failure and political fiction of 'free' medicine is that for many people with the lowest incomes it has not been available when, where, or how it was wanted.... The further false claim that it offered the highest quality of medical care in the world was obscured by the widespread experience that it was ironically not available at all when it was most wanted. The plausible emphasis on priority or 'acute' cases did not obscure the anxieties, deterioration of symptoms, or the burden heaped on the families of the

chronically sick." [Arthur Seldon, Government Failure and Over-Government, Vol. 5 of The Collected Works of Arthur Seldon (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), pp. 108-109]

19 August 2009

Editor, Los Angeles Times

Dear Editor:

Re "Obama's evolution on a public option in healthcare reform" (August 19): The administration repeatedly insists that a "public option" is a way of (as spokesman Robert Gibbs describes it) "fostering choice and competition in a private health insurance market."

I don't get it. Americans have goo-gobs of choice and competition in many markets that have no "public options." For example, choice and competition are abundant in the market for automobile insurance, even though no government-run insurer competes along side State Farm and Geico. Choice and competition also thrive in grocery retailing without a government-run supermarket challenging Safeway and Whole Foods for customers. The same

is true in countless other markets.

If Mr. Obama were interested in fostering greater choice and competition among health-insurers, he would work to break down government-imposed restrictions on interstate competition among such insurers and oppose government-imposed restrictions on coverage options, including restrictions on offering high-deductible plans.

19 August 2009

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

Dear Editor:

Using gentle humor, Kathleen Parker explains why those "Progressives" now boycotting Whole Foods should be more tolerant of WF's CEO John Mackey's contribution to the current conversation on government's role in supplying health care ("Whole-Grain Health Reform," August 19).

Indeed so. These allegedly enlightened Americans should take the advice of a truly enlightened thinker who lived two centuries ago and kept one of the most

famous salons of her day, Madame de Stael. This liberal lady insisted that a conversation without interruption is dead - that interruption is the life of conversation. [See Will and Ariel Durant, *The Age of Napoleon* (1975), page 649]

Those who wish to punish persons who express dissenting opinions are uninterested in learning. Their minds are closed, making them and those who represent them an especially dangerous bunch to trust with the task of reforming America's health-care markets.

18 August 2009

Editor, Concord Monitor

Dear Editor:

Asserting that "habitual consumption of bottled water is a waste of money (Isn't that for each consumer of bottled water to determine?) you criticize bottled water as being a "source of landfill waste. An estimated 60 million plastic bottles are dumped in landfills every day." You further allege that "drinking bottled water also wastes fuel."

Let me try my hand at such arrogance.

Habitual reading of newspapers is a waste of money. Newspapers are a source of landfill waste. Millions of tons of newsprint are dumped into landfills every day. And reading these inky pages also wastes fuel - fuel used to power paper mills, printing presses, and delivery trucks. Oh, and what about trees?! How many trees are cut down each year simply to gratify the self-indulgent desire of consumers to read newspapers and the greedy itch of publishers to reap profits?

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Now realizing what a scourge you are to your readers and to the environment, will you shut down? And if not, why not? Can you explain how producing and reading newspapers differs from producing and drinking bottled water?

18 August 2009

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

To the Editor:

Kudos to you for defending Whole Foods CEO John Mackey against the many "Progressives" who are

intolerant of his support for free markets ("Whole Foolishness," August 18).

How hypocritical of these "Progressives." Seeking to further reduce the role of markets in the provision of health care, they proudly vote in markets with their dollars to avoid patronizing a store run by a chief executive whose opinion they dislike. Yet the very opinion that they so ardently oppose is one that, were it heeded, would enhance the ability of health-care consumers to vote with their dollars.

17 August 2009

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

To the Editor:

David Williams is absolutely correct when he writes that "There is no authority in the Constitution for government to take over our health care, just as there was no authority in the Constitution to take over General Motors or take taxpayer money to bail out failing banks" (Letters, August 17).

Unfortunately, not are such arguments irrelevant to the typical American, but also

the cognoscenti dismiss them with utter contempt. To point to the actual text of the Constitution as a restraint on Uncle Sam's meddling in the economy is today the constitutional-law equivalent of treating your date to some Twinkies and a bottle of white zinfandel before taking her to a professional-wrestling match.