



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.

19 December 2009

Station Manager, Jim
Farley
WTOP Radio
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Farley:

Each time your station runs a comment by Colbert King, Cal Thomas, and other pundits, your anchors announce "WTOP brings you commentary from both sides."

The "conservative/liberal" division - although thought of in America today as the two alternative, relevant "sides" of political opinion - is no such thing. If we talk seriously of two "sides," a

much more realistic division is between those persons with a fetish for centralized power and those persons who distrust such power.

Modern "liberals" long for Washington to design and control the economy in great detail. Modern conservatives look to government to engineer the polity's moral tone and (with some notable exceptions, such as George Will) to deploy U.S. military might to "build nations" or "spread democracy" abroad. Despite their differences on particular policy issues, both modern "liberals" and

conservatives have a fetish for centralized coercion.

So the side opposite both the modern "liberal" and conservative is occupied by those persons who are neither conservative nor "liberal" but, rather, deeply suspicious of entrusting government with power.

And these "power skeptics," as we might call them, are far more willing than are "liberals" and conservatives to let individual men and women choose their own courses in life - to buy and sell and work as they wish; to save and invest - and ingest - as they choose; to partner with each other

romantically, commercially, and socially in whatever peaceful ways they like; to keep the full fruits of their efforts and risk-taking, and not be coerced into subsidizing those who are less industrious or adventurous; and not to be forced to support military adventures that have no direct and compelling relationship to the protection of peace and property at home.

17 December 2009

Friends,

My GMU colleague Larry White filmed this two-plus minute video earlier today in Bangalore, India, where he is visiting with his wife Neera. It shows how far India has come because of globalization - and how far it still has to go. Very interesting.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKtRfEM9uec>

17 December 2009

Friends,

Below are two links for you to virtuoso performances by two of my GMU colleagues.

The first is Tom Hazlett's op-ed in the Financial Times on Ronald Coase

and the electromagnetic spectrum:

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/bfffd9fa-e9e2-11de-ae43-00144feab49a.html?nclickcheck=1>

(By the way, a Happy 99th Birthday, later this month, to Prof. Coase - who's still an active researcher.)

The second link is to Russ Roberts's PBS commentary yesterday on John Maynard Keynes: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business/july-dec09/keynes_12-16.html

16 December 2009

Mr. Bob Schieffer
CBS News

Dear Mr. Schieffer:

Interviewed on December 11th by Washington's WTOP radio, you observed that "none of the senators really knows what's in the health-care bill they're debating." (You then excused this ignorance by noting that "the problem they're tackling is very complicated.")

Here's a question that I'd like you, as one of America's most respected news analysts, to ask Sen. Reid and Speaker Pelosi: "If ignorance of the law is no excuse - and if this health-care bill becomes 'law' - will Congress excuse private citizens from the obligation to obey every new command and to pay every new tax specified in this health-care legislation?"

Surely ignorance of the law IS an excuse - and a darn good one - if the 'law' is so long and complicated that even the legislators who voted for it cannot possibly read and comprehend it all.

14 December 2009

Mr. Bob Schieffer
CBS News

Dear Mr. Schieffer:

Interviewed on Friday by WTOP radio, you observed that "none of the senators really knows what's in the health-care bill they're debating." You then excused this ignorance by noting that "the problem they're tackling is very complicated."

While you're correct that trying to engineer an industry that's one-sixth the size of the U.S. economy is indeed very complicated, such complexity - far from excusing Congress's efforts - should be Exhibit A in a criminal indictment of Congress and the White House. Our world is full of complexities that defy human engineering. Can Congress engineer winter snow away from Minnesota or summer hurricanes away from the Gulf Coast? Of course not, and any attempts Congress might make to do so would be seen immediately to be hubris of the highest and most hazardous sort.

Attempts to consciously re-design the health-care industry are equally hubristic and hazardous.

That industry is one of billions of unique relationships, each of which is part of countless long chains of efforts to transform raw materials and human effort into life-improving and life-saving drugs and treatments. Like weather, these long chains of human relationships weren't designed by anyone. Like weather, they change and evolve. And like weather, their all-important details are beyond the comprehension of would-be re-designers. These long chains of human relationships cannot be undone and reassembled at will by politicians and 'experts' without risking enormous unintended catastrophe.

Want proof? Look no further than your own lament that the very 'engineers' - the members of Congress - who are now attempting to redesign the details of the health-care industry cannot even read and grasp all of the words on the bill that they're debating.

If an engineer can't understand even his own blueprint, why should we trust him to understand the vastly more complex reality that his blueprint allegedly represents? And, more importantly, why should we

trust that engineer with the task of redesigning that reality?