



## 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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8 January 2010

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

To the Editor:

Trying to justify raising taxes on Americans who buy foreign-made steel, United Steelworkers' President Leo Gerard says that "China flat-out cheats in its trade practices" (Letters, Jan. 8).

By "cheats," of course, Mr. Gerard means that the Chinese find ways around artifices designed to restrict Americans' access to Chinese-made products.

In fact, the real cheats are Mr. Gerard, U.S. steelmakers, and Uncle Sam. They conspire together to deny to hundreds of millions of Americans opportunities to take advantage of the best deals possible. They scheme to restrict Americans' choices so that steel producers in the U.S. don't have to work so hard to earn consumers' dollars. They connive to raise their own spending power by reducing the spending power of millions of others.

7 January 2010

Editor, The New York  
Times

620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

Manhattan College political-science professor Pamela Chasek writes that "Without taxes and without government, there will be little or no investment in infrastructure, transit, education, science, national parks and so on" (Letters, Jan. 7).

Not so. Examples abound of private provision of such public goods. For example, consider Reston, VA and Columbia, MD - towns whose designs and infrastructures were supplied privately.

Consider the many private schools that flourish today. Consider Grace Rainey Rogers's creation, nearly a century ago, of the Rainey Sanctuary - a 26,000-acre private wildlife preserve in Louisiana. Consider Thomas Edison's research labs in Menlo Park, NJ.

Consider also the research - including that by your own columnist Hal Varian, and that by my colleague Russell Roberts - showing that government provision of public goods crowds out a sizeable portion of private investment in public goods.

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6 January 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Harold Meyerson complains about "the ever-larger role of money in politics" without realizing that this corrupting influence is the unavoidable result of the ever-larger role of politics in money ("Without a movement, progressives can't aid Obama's agenda," Jan. 6)

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5 January 2010

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

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman argues that protectionism can create jobs in times of unemployment ("Chinese New Year," Dec. 31).

If Mr. Krugman is correct, why stop at national borders? Just think how many jobs Congress could create by encouraging states to erect their own tariff walls? Vermont ice-creameries would never again lose customers to Pennsylvania ice-creameries. California wineries would never again lose market share to rivals in Oregon and Washington state. Michigan autoworkers would never again be displaced from their jobs by workers in Ohio and South Carolina.

Given Mr. Krugman's assumption that restricting consumers' freedom to make cross-border purchases increases the total number of jobs in economies suffering unemployment, why let all those borders between Maine and California go to waste? Turn those borders, too, into barriers to trade and watch

American employment  
skyrocket!

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31 December 2009

Editor, Wall Street Journal

Dear Editor:

You are rightly critical of the vote by the U.S. International Trade Commission to, as you say, "impose new duties on imports from China" ("Steeling from Americans," Dec. 31).

I suggest that you describe such protectionist actions in a way that is more in tune with the title of your editorial - namely, as new duties imposed on American consumers.

Imports themselves never pay duties. Duties are paid always by parties to voluntary economic exchanges. And because duties unnecessarily diminish the attractiveness of such exchanges to consumers, Uncle Sam's duties are not taxes on inanimate objects from abroad; they are taxes on innocent Americans here at home.

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30 December 2009

Editor, The New York Times  
620 Eighth Avenue

New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

Two celebrated advocates of active and expansive government - President Obama and yourself - admit, quite accurately, that the security breach on Northwest Flight 253 represents a momentous failure of government ("The System Failed," Dec. 30).

Please ponder this fact carefully. Government's core function is to protect citizens from violence. If Uncle Sam fails at this central, all-important task, what reason have we to trust that it will succeed at delivering less-costly and higher-quality health-care? Or at productively restructuring financial markets?

Surely, before government directs energy and resources to these and the countless other tasks that it now tries to do, it should first master its most fundamental duty.

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30 December 2009

Friends,

Steve Levitt praises the creative work of my young GMU Econ colleague Pete Leeson in this blogpost at Freakonomics:

<http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/29/freakonomics-meets-pirates-of-the-caribbean/#more-23769>

I'm pleased and proud to say that I first met Pete when he was a senior in high school in Midland, MI.

Happy 2010 to all!

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29 December 2009

Editor, Democrat and Chronicle  
Rochester, NY

Dear Editor:

Your report on Gov. David Paterson increasing his security detail in order to enhance his political prestige ("Troopers union rips staffing for Paterson," Dec. 29) calls to mind H.L. Mencken's description of the chief talent of successful politicians: "their power to impress and enchant the intellectually underprivileged." [H.L. Mencken, "The Politician," in *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (Knopf, 1949), pp. 148-149]

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28 December 2009

News Editor, WTOP Radio  
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

A pundit (I forget his name) interviewed on your station this morning predicted that 2010 will "witness the continued long and sad decline in American manufacturing prowess."

Your pundit is misinformed. Manufacturing EMPLOYMENT in the U.S. continues to fall. But this fact is caused precisely by growth in U.S. manufacturing "prowess." Data from the Federal Reserve and the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that average output per manufacturing worker today is \$234,220 (reckoned in 2000 dollars) - an amount of output that is 43 percent larger than in 2000 and 200 percent larger than in 1970.

As for total U.S. manufacturing output, if the U.S. manufacturing sector were a separate economy, it would be tied with Germany as the world's fourth largest economy (behind the U.S., Japan, and China). [Data can be found here, in this blog post by my former research assistant Mark Perry:

<http://blog.american.com/?p=8593>]