



## Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux  
 Chairman, Department of Economics  
 George Mason University  
[dboudrea@gmu.edu](mailto: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.**

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2 May 2010

Friends,

To those of you on my list - alas, a distressingly large number - who've written to scold me about my alleged naivete regarding immigrants and crime, I send to you this short essay by the Chicago Tribune's outstanding columnist Steve Chapman: <http://reason.com/archives/2010/04/22/how-immigration-crackdowns-bac>

Seems like (1) Arizona isn't in the midst of any great immigrant-crime wave, and (2) the problems that lately have indeed intensified are the direct result of Uncle

Sam's increased efforts to crack-down on "illegal" immigration.

Go figure.

2 May 2010

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

Dear Editor:

George Will rightly charges left-liberal opponents of Arizona's immigration statute of cynically exploiting it to discredit the courageous men and women who object to Washington's current agenda to politicize all aspects of Americans' lives

("Arizona law's foes are using the real immigration scare tactics," May 2).

Unusually for Mr. Will, though, his defense of Arizona's statute rests on weak reeds. For example, excusing Arizona's threat to punish immigrants who don't carry documentation, Mr. Will notes that since 1952 federal legislation specifically requires the carrying of such documentation. So Arizona now is simply enforcing the law, right?

Wrong. That requirement from 1952 has long gone unenforced - a fact that means that it is no longer law.

Those who disagree with this conception of law should consider these words, currently on the books as Chapter 272, Section 18 of the General Laws of Massachusetts: "Whoever commits fornication shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than three months or by a fine of not more than thirty dollars." If a Javert-like Attorney General of the Bay State began to arrest unmarried adults who have consensual sex with each other, would Mr. Will - or anyone else - endorse this official's actions as appropriate enforcement of the law?

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1 May 2010

News Editor, WTOP Radio  
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

This morning's caller who reports that her "heart is broken" by Tea Partiers' "disrespect for Washington" reminds me of one of H.L. Mencken's many trenchant, useful, and eternal insights. After describing government accurately as a "great pox of civilization," Mencken observed that "The fact that it [government] is generally respected - that it possesses effective

machinery for propagating and safeguarding that respect - is the main shield of the rogues and vagabonds who use it to exploit the great masses of diligent and credulous men." [H.L. Mencken, *Prejudices: A Selection* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996 [1947]), pp. 187-188]

The danger isn't that some Americans have a low opinion of Washington; the danger is that too many Americans have a high opinion of it.

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1 May 2010

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

To the Editor:

Like the A.C.L.U.'s Anthony Romero (Letters, May 1), I detest Arizona's anti-immigration statute. And I agree that it at least skirts on the edge of violating the Constitution.

But it's mighty annoying that the A.C.L.U. and many other left-liberal voices so self-righteously defend the Constitution on the question of Arizona's legislation but champion that document's violation by the likes of Obamacare

and other "progressive" policies.

Has the A.C.L.U. pointed out that the Constitution does not grant the national government any power to force Americans to buy health insurance? Where are "progressives'" predictions of police-state abuses when the F.D.A. announces that it will regulate something as personal and as private as the amount of salt that each American consumes?

30 April 2010

Mr. George Will  
Washington Post

Dear Mr. Will:

As you're aware, I almost always agree with you. But I believe that you miss the boat in your column defending Arizona's new immigration statute ("A law Arizona can live with," April 28).

It's true that the traipsing of Hispanic immigrants across Arizonans' backyards at 3am poses an intolerable problem. But this and other problems are artifacts of the severe restrictions currently placed on immigration by Uncle Sam.

Instead of excusing Arizona's current statute – one that only further tightens the very sorts of restrictions that cause such troubles – why not instead propose that Arizona's government take a more direct and sure route to solving such problems?

Why not suggest that that state open its borders to the same degree that America's borders were open until as recently as the 1920s?

With such openness, there would be no need for immigrants to stealthily steal in to Arizona in the dark of night. There would be no massive wasting of taxpayer resources on the surrealistically counterproductive task of preventing these alleged welfare-seeking, public-goods-destroying sponges from working legally and paying taxes. (More than half of Arizona's new statute is aimed at stopping "illegal" immigrants from finding jobs in that state. What does this fact tell you?) Crime rates would fall as immigrants would come out of the shadows and have greater access to legal, gainful employment.

Such a policy as I propose here for the State of Arizona would undoubtedly be challenged on constitutional grounds. But this fact is of no moment because Arizona's new legislation is itself sparking, however wrongheadedly, its own constitutional challenge.

And because you're correct that actions taken locally deserve more deference than do actions taken by Uncle Sam, why should we stand idly by as Uncle Sam determines, from his distant and insular perch, the number of immigrants

who can legally enter Arizona? If we truly should defer to state-legislators' trustworthy knowledge of local conditions, then surely Phoenix is better positioned than is Washington to determine immigration policy for Arizona.

I agree that Arizonans ought not continue to suffer the ill-consequences unleashed by Washington's highly restrictive immigration policies. But why shouldn't champions of freedom, such as you, encourage Arizonans to fight today's problems, not with more of the same bitter and pricey medicine that causes these problems, but rather with more liberal immigration policies - policies that would put an end to nearly all the problems visited today on that great state by policies imposed by a distant, arrogant, and unknowing government in Washington?

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30 April 2010

Editor, The Wall Street  
Journal  
1211 6th Ave.  
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

Michael Mirmak rightly  
opposes farm subsidies

and tariffs (Letters, April 30). But in doing so he commits a common error that insults the peoples of poor nations. That error is to assume that, if rich-nations' agricultural policies artificially take markets away from poor-nations' farmers, then the peoples of poor nations are thereby condemned to poverty.

Agriculture is only one of many possible paths out of poverty. Even if Africans would indeed have a comparative advantage at growing crops for world markets were it not for U.S. and European farm policies, growing crops isn't the only specialty at which Africans can prosper.

The people of Hong Kong, for example, did not begin their spectacular climb from poverty to affluence through farming but, rather, through small-scale manufacturing. Are Africans different than the Chinese? Are Africans robots programmed only to grow crops? Are Africans so bereft of talent, ingenuity, ambition, and flexibility that the only tasks at which they can possibly succeed is farming? Of course not.

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28 April 2010

Ms. Lynn Parramore  
Editor, New Deal 2.0

Dear Ms. Parramore:

Writing at the Huffington Post, you're comforted by Prof. Stephanie Kelton's claim that government programs can never be insolvent ("The Deficit: Nine Myths We Can't Afford," April 27). Prof. Kelton explains: "government's ability to pay benefits does not in any way depend on the balance in the Social Security or Medicare Trust Funds. Benefit checks come directly from the Treasury, and, as Alan Greenspan has admitted, '[A] government cannot become insolvent with respect to obligations in its own currency.'"

That is, because government can print money, Social Security and Medicare will always have sufficient funds to meet their obligations. So we've nothing to worry about!

You're deeply confused. The concern about these programs' obligations is not that Uncle Sam won't find enough green pieces of paper to enable him to pay. The concern is that the process government will

have to go through to get this money – raising taxes or inflating the money supply – will devastate the economy.

Your advice to not worry about government's huge financial obligations reveals your belief that Uncle Sam conjures real wealth and resources by using green ink to paint countless tiny monochrome portraits of dead American statesmen.

If Uncle Sam's green ink truly is so miraculous a substance, why not have Washington assume the debts of the entire country? With Uncle Sam using his magical green ink to pay everyone's car notes, house notes, student loans, credit-card bills, gambling debts, and pledges to NPR, each American will accumulate such riches and wallow in such opulence as to become the envy of every oil sheik.

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27 April 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Echoing Claude Rains's famous line in Casablanca, Richard Cohen rightly

ridicules Arizona politicians' latest effort to "round up the usual suspects" ("Casablanca West: Arizona rounds up the usual suspects," April 27). By demonizing immigrants, these politicians exploit voters' misinformation about the economic consequences of the alleged devils. Good for Mr. Cohen to expose politicians' gaudy and dangerous toadying to voters who wrongly believe that immigrants are greedy leeches on the economy.

Sadly, the witch hunt in Arizona is playing out on a larger scale in Washington. Congress is rounding up the usual suspects. It is demonizing largely innocent and highly productive folks, only a minority of whom suckle at government's teat. Congress is exploiting the prejudices of voters whose understanding of who these alleged devils are and what they do is infantile. Self-righteous bullies such as Sen. Carl Levin are feathering their own political nests by stoking the widespread misconception that evil leeches are preying on the economy - leeches that, we're assured, must be burned off the body-economic by the Capitol's high priests.

In fact, compared to this inquisition by Congress of financiers, bankers, and insurers, Arizona Republicans are rank amateurs in the dark arts of inflaming popular prejudices against unjustly maligned and feared minorities.

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26 April 2010

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

To the Editor:

Robert Frank asserts that the libertarian case against income redistribution "falls on its own terms" ("The Tax Hiding in Your Paycheck," April 24).

He rests this assertion on the fact that in private markets the most productive workers in a firm generally accept wages that are a bit below these workers' productivity levels, while the least-productive workers in that same firm are paid wages that are a bit higher than these low-productive workers' productivity levels. Mr. Frank describes this voluntary outcome as one in which high-productivity workers are "taxed" for the

benefit of low-productivity workers.

Two questions for Mr. Frank. First, once we recognize that the market already, voluntarily, carries out what you describe as income transfers, isn't the case for government to perform such transfers weakened rather than strengthened?

Second, the libertarian case doesn't "fall on ITS own terms." Rather, you mistake it for falling because you confuse YOUR terms. A tax - according to Dictionary.com - is "a sum of money demanded by a government for its support." Libertarians resist taxes because they are extracted by force and because they are used to support government and crony interest groups. Neither of these features is present in the labor-market scenario that you describe.

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26 April 2010

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

To the Editor:

Robert Frank argues that the libertarian case against income redistribution "falls

on its own terms" ("The Tax Hiding in Your Paycheck," April 24).

He rests his argument on the fact that in private markets the most-productive workers in a firm generally accept wages that are a bit below these workers' productivity levels, while the least-productive workers in that same firm are paid wages that are a bit higher than these low-productive workers' productivity levels. Mr. Frank describes this situation as one in which private employers "transfer large amounts of income from the most productive to the least productive workers." Because such "transfers" occur voluntarily in private markets, Mr. Frank asserts that libertarians' objections to income transfers carried out by government are irrational.

What a weird and dangerous argument. Just because something is done voluntarily doesn't mean that objections to the state doing more of that something are irrational.

Would Mr. Frank argue, say, that libertarians' objection to government censorship "falls on its own terms" because people are forever privately censoring

speech. I, for example, don't allow students to disrupt my classes with perorations, and I prohibit guests in my home from discussing inappropriate topics. Is my libertarian case against government censorship, then, inconsistent? Should I cast aside as irrational my fear of government censorship?

26 April 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Discussing the proposed financial "reform," Robert Samuelson uncharacteristically lets hysteria cloud his judgment ("Financial reform's big unknowns," April 26). Why else would he grant the validity of Peter Wallison's concern that "close regulation of too-big-to-fail financial organizations will give them a privileged status and make them 'tools of the U.S. government'" and then immediately dismiss this concern by saying "Nevertheless, something seems better than nothing"?

Mr. Samuelson should review economic history. A good place to start is with

How the West Grew Rich, a 1986 book by Stanford University economic historian Nathan Rosenberg and his co-author L.E. Birdzell, Jr. In this one straightforward sentence, Rosenberg and Birdzell summarize an indispensable key to western economic growth: "The West's sustained economic growth began with the emergence of an economic sphere with a high degree of autonomy from political and religious control." [Nathan Rosenberg & L.E. Birdzell, Jr., How the West Grew Rich (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 24] In other words, our prosperity flowered only when the state started resisting the urge to do "something."

It's scary that the economy's autonomy from political control is now shrinking fast. And it's sad that many normally sensible people such as Mr. Samuelson - reacting to this single economic downturn whose causes remain hotly disputed - so cavalierly call for this autonomy to shrink even faster and further.