



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.

15 August 2010

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Joanna Weiss asserts that the lack of government-mandated paid maternity leave in the United States is "a sign of how little our society values childrearing" ("Family values?" August 15).

I have a different take: the lack of government mandated paid maternity leave in the United States is a sign of how much - at least relative to many other countries - our society values freedom of contract and the voluntary choices

of adults over the paternalistic commands of the state.

14 August 2010

Editor, Washington Times

Dear Editor:

Haydee Pavia writes that "The majority of [Mexican] illegal aliens come here to attain the American dream and take it back to their native country. These scofflaws don't come here because of idealism, but for the wealth they can acquire and one day take back to their native country" (Letters, August 14).

Suppose that Ms. Pavia's claim is correct. So what? The vast majority of these immigrants acquire their wealth by working - a fact that means that the wealth that immigrants accumulate while in America is paid to them voluntarily.

That is, these immigrants acquire wealth only by creating goods and services that are valued by the Americans who hire or otherwise do business with them. The process that Ms. Pavia describes and dislikes benefits both working immigrants and Americans, regardless of whether or not immigrants

take their earnings back to Mexico.

We should encourage such immigration rather than dismiss it on the grounds that the typical immigrant might be motivated by ideals no more lofty than those that prompt the typical American to rise from bed each morning in order to earn a living.

13 August 2010

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Kudos to Scott Bullock, Jeff Rowes, and their colleagues at the Institute for Justice for defending the right of monks at St. Joseph Abbey in Louisiana to sell caskets - and, hence, for defending the right of people to buy caskets from whomever they please ("In defense of monks and free enterprise," August 13).

I have personal evidence that Louisiana's requirement that all caskets be bought from a licensed funeral director is simply meant to protect funeral directors from competition.

When my mother died in 2008, a friend recommended that we bury

her in a casket from St. Joseph Abbey. While making arrangements at the funeral home - but before we mentioned an Abbey casket to the funeral director - my family and I were shown several caskets that the home offered for sale. All were pricey. When we finally mentioned that we were considering a casket from St. Joseph Abbey, the funeral director suddenly remembered that he offered some less-expensive caskets. Only then did he show us his more competitively priced models.

12 August 2010

Friends,

My former GMU student Mrs. Michelle McAdoo - also known as "the Rebel Economist" - explores, in this entertaining video, the public's understanding of stimulus spending:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Gp0JuBp8xA>

11 August 2010

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

To the Editor:

Reviewing Andrew Beahrs's book about Mark Twain's culinary tastes, William Grimes remarks that the author of Huckleberry Finn lived in "a country soon to be overwhelmed by industrialized agriculture and ecological catastrophe" ("Your Tired, Your Poor and Their Food," August 8).

"Ecological catastrophe?!" Mr. Grimes confuses his fashionable suppositions with actual history. A genuine ecological catastrophe would have made human existence a nightmare in the 100 years since Mr. Twain's death. Instead, the past century has witnessed unprecedented improvements in living standards.

Agricultural output is several times higher today, both in absolute amount and in yield-per-acre. Available supplies of nearly all minerals continue to increase. Americans of all income levels are much better fed, much better clothed, much better housed, and much better cared for medically. The automobile cleaned America's streets of the dung and flies that once cursed denizens of cities and towns. Electricity and

petroleum have replaced far-filthier coal and wood as major sources of household energy. Perhaps most significantly, life expectancy in 2010 is 30 years longer than it was in 1910.

Let's hope that this "catastrophe" continues.

10 August 2010

Editor, The New York Post

Dear Editor:

You report that "Rep. Charlie Rangel says he has no regrets about helping steer taxpayer money to a financially troubled nonprofit - and, indeed, resents The Post even asking questions about it" ("Rangel wrongs again?" August 10).

Had Mr. Rangel given this financially troubled nonprofit his own money, his resentment of a newspaper asking questions about it would be completely justified. But the fact that Mr. Rangel resents being asked what he managed to do with taxpayers' money is evidence that he makes no distinction between what belongs to him and what belongs to others. He seems sincerely to believe that exercising his power to

grab and spend other people's money somehow makes other people's money his own. That's the attitude of a thief.

9 August 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Jean Phillips asserts that privatization of alcoholic-spirits retailing in Virginia will result in more "inebriated drivers, abusive drunks and alcohol-induced bodily organ failure" (Letters, August 9).

In a study for the Virginia Institute for Public Policy, Julia Williams and I find that the facts contradict Ms. Phillips's assertion. Incidences of alcohol-related health and social problems - such as drunk-driving fatalities - in the 18 states, including Virginia, that retail spirits through monopoly, state-owned and operated stores are no different than they are in the 32 states (and D.C.) that license private retailers to sell spirits. [Donald J. Boudreaux and Julia Williams, "Impaired Judgment: The Failure of Control States to Reduce Alcohol-Related Problems,"

Virginia Institute for Public Policy, June 2010]

The chief reason is that, because the vast majority of alcohol-related problems are caused by the small percentage of people who drink abusively, selling spirits through ABC stores is unlikely to prevent such drinkers from getting as much alcohol as they'd get if it were retailed privately.