



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.

11 September 2010

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Derrick Z. Jackson asserts that "obesity" is a "threat" to "our waistlines" ("Obesity's punch to the gut," Sept. 11).

His assertion is an example of how support for dangerous government policy springs from the failure to properly identify cause and effect, as well as from the misuse of plural pronouns.

"Obesity" isn't an acting agent. It, as such, "threatens" no one.

Obesity is a consequence, not a cause. It is a consequence of behavior by individuals.

And happily for each of us, obesity afflicts only those individual persons who act in ways that promote his or her own obesity. No one else's waistline is threatened. For example, because I watch what I eat and because I exercise regularly, MY waistline isn't threatened by obesity even if my neighbor or co-worker or third cousin on my mother's side grows obese. And what's true for me is true for nearly every other individual in America.

"We" do not have a waistline.

10 September 2010

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

To the Editor:

Alan Tonelson's and Kevin Kearns's case for taxing or otherwise throwing obstacles in the way of American consumers who seek to buy foreign-made products is a string of errors and misconceptions ("Trading Away the Stimulus," Sept. 10).

For example, these authors assert that America's trade deficit is "a central reason why American growth has lagged and President Obama's stimulus hasn't led to a robust recovery." Nonsense. While it's true that the 2010 trade deficit is higher than it was at the same time in 2009, the 2009 trade deficit was less than half the size of the trade deficit in 2007. Research by Cato Institute economist Dan Griswold reveals that trade deficits grow when the U.S. economy booms and shrink when it slows. [\[http://madabouttrade.wordpress.com/2010/08/12/more-nonsense-about-the-trade-deficit/\]](http://madabouttrade.wordpress.com/2010/08/12/more-nonsense-about-the-trade-deficit/)

Tonelson and Kearns allege that those of us who would repair the economy with tax cuts are naively out-of-touch because we rely on a theory "rooted in" the 1980s. Perhaps. But the thoroughly discredited theory that Tonelson and Kearns rely on – mercantilism – is rooted in the seventeenth century.

9 September 2010

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

To the Editor:

You report that the Obama administration seeks "legislation that would give the federal government the power to reject unreasonable rate increases" by health insurers ("White House Warns Insurers Against Rate Hikes," Sept. 9).

Sounds reasonable. But it isn't. "Unreasonable" is too vague and subjective a standard for guiding a government agency that possesses the power to block price increases. While by definition any "unreasonable" action is questionable and likely harmful, there is in fact no objective way for government to distinguish reasonable price hikes from unreasonable ones.

Consider, for example, if the First amendment prohibited Congress from making laws "abridging reasonable speech." Who would trust government officials with the power to differentiate "reasonable" speech from "unreasonable" speech? Who would not doubt that such power would be abused?

What's true for speech (and other First-amendment rights) is true for prices: it is

unreasonable to give government power over such matters. Only competition among insurers will reveal which rates are reasonable and which ones aren't.

8 September 2010

Editor, Baltimore Sun

Dear Editor:

I object to the sentiment conveyed by the title of Andrew Yarrow's op-ed "Vote now or forever hold your peace" (Sept. 8). There might be good reasons for voting; either prudence or ethics, or both, might suggest it to a citizen as a sound practice.

But because rights are not created by government - because we are indeed "endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights" - the non-voter retains his or her right to speak out in defense of those rights whenever they are assaulted by either private individuals or by government.

To insinuate that persons who don't vote have no standing to speak out in defense of their rights and liberties is to insinuate that voting is a pre-condition of those rights and liberties. Such a belief is profoundly

contrary to the political philosophy championed by the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

7 September 2010

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

To the Editor:

EPA Assistant Administrator Gina McCarthy explains that her agency is designing a new and improved fuel-economy label for (mandated) placement on all new cars sold in the U.S. (Letters, Sept. 7).

Taking Ms. McCarthy's advice, I visited the EPA's website and examined each of the proposed new labels. I was disappointed to find that a vital piece of information related to fuel economy is missing from both labels - namely, the increased risk of traffic fatalities that result from higher fuel "economy." To raise fuel economy, automakers often reduce the weight of their cars, which typically means making cars' bodies and structural supports out of lighter-weight, weaker metal. So a car that is more "fuel efficient" will

likely also be one that is less "health efficient."

Because Ms. McCarthy is right that it is "imperative that consumers have more information," I propose that the new label also explains the magnitude of the increased health risks suffered by automobile occupants as a consequence of government-mandated fuel-efficiency standards.

6 September 2010

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

To the Editor:

The presumption is now widely shared that America's infrastructure is "crumbling" (Letters, Sept. 6). Frankly, I doubt that the condition is as dire as so many people now think it to be. But let's grant the truth of the presumption.

Apart from supplying national defense, policing, and courts of law, there's no duty that people believe to be more central to the core role of government than building and maintaining infrastructure. So if government can't or won't perform one of its core functions, why entrust

it with additional functions - such as managing the costs of medical care - that are not at its core?

If, for example, Safeway supermarket routinely failed to adequately stock its stores with milk, canned vegetables, coffee, and other groceries, would its board of directors be acting wisely if that board approved management's plan to expand into the business of retailing jewelry?