



**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.**

---

17 October 2010

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

To the Editor:

Paul Wagenseil is correct that "From 1954 through 1963, federal income tax topped out at an astonishing 91 percent" - but he is mistaken to conclude from this fact that "the government during the Eisenhower years was able to do more because it had more" (Letters, Oct. 17).

Over the course of the ten years that Mr. Wagenseil praises for their

"astonishing" tax rates, Uncle Sam's annual revenues averaged 17.5 percent of GDP. During the ten-year stretch of 2000 through 2009, these revenues averaged 17.6 percent of GDP.

In 2010-dollar terms, the "astonishing" tax year with the HIGHEST federal revenues - 1963 - Uncle Sam's receipts totaled \$756,072 billion. During the period 2000 through 2009, the year with the LOWEST federal revenues - 2009 - Uncle Sam's receipts totaled \$2.1 TRILLION - or 178 percent more real revenues than in 1963. [Historical Tables, Budget of the U.S.

Government. Fiscal Year 2011. Office of Management and Budget]

16 October 2010

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

To the Editor:

Explaining the political necessity that many Democrats feel to publicly denounce House Speaker Nancy Pelosi - and conceding that these denunciations will cause problems for Democrats in the next Congress - Democratic political strategist Mark Mellman

says "But more people are concerned about winning than about whatever post-election problems we might have" ("Pelosi Renounced by Candidates in Her Own Party," Oct. 16).

I admire Mr. Mellman's honesty. Public-choice scholars, such as my George Mason University colleagues James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, have long argued that politicians' vision never extends beyond the next election. The consequence of this political myopia is that, contrary to popular myth, government is NOT uniquely concerned with the future; instead, it too frequently sacrifices great long-run benefits in exchange for the cheap trinket of immediate victory at the polls.

---

15 October 2010

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

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman rightly complains about the "robo-signers" of mortgage-foreclosure documents ("The Mortgage Morass," Oct. 15). If robo-signing really occurred, it is

inexcusable. People should not have their lives affected by posers who sign and give life to legal documents without even reading the contents of these documents.

The same complaint, however, ought to be leveled against what we might call "robo-voters" - legislators who vote to give life to legislation without even reading the contents of the legislation. If the robo-signing of mortgage-foreclosure documents justifies a moratorium on foreclosures, surely the robo-voting for, say, Obamacare justifies a moratorium on the implementation of that legislation - a massive legal document that was approved with the votes of many legislators who admitted that they'd not read the entire bill before voting for its enactment.

---

12 October 2010

<http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-52150720101013?feedType=RSS=everything=11709>

If governments fought real wars like they fight trade wars, here's how the transcript of the communiqués between the leaders of two warring nations would read:

Leader of Absurditopia  
(A): I say, leader of Stupidia – we demand that you stop occupying that contested strip of land. If you refuse, we'll have no choice but to shoot our own citizens.

Leader of Stupidia (S): You don't scare us! That land is ours. And if you DO kill some of your own people, make no mistake that we will immediately – and just as cruelly – commence to killing OUR own people. Courage is our national motto!

(A): Ha! You're bluffing. But I'm not. I've just courageously ordered my troops to mow down in cold blood ten percent of my fellow countrymen. Take that!

(S): How dare you attack you like that! You leave us no choice but to attack us. I am ordering the Stupidian army to slaughter 15 percent of innocent Stupidians here in Stupidia. How do you like them apples?!

(A): You are cruel and inhuman to damage us by killing your people. I hereby instruct all of my fellow Absurditopians to commit suicide! Only then will you nasty Stupidians

get your proper  
comeuppance and we  
Absurditopians the justice  
that we are due!

(S): You can't beat us, you  
Absurditopian you! Listen  
up. I'm ordering all of MY  
fellow citizens – Stupidians  
all! – to commit suicide.  
We'll see who emerges  
victorious!

....

Then a long, long silence.

12 October 2010

Editor, Milwaukee Journal-  
Sentinel

Dear Editor:

You found that Sen. Russ  
Feingold's claim that  
"unfair" trade deals have  
cost 64,000 jobs in  
Wisconsin to be "half true"  
("Sen. Russ Feingold says  
unfair trade deals have  
cost 64,000 jobs in  
Wisconsin," Oct. 12). You  
are waaaaaaaay too  
generous to the senator.

As you report, Sen.  
Feingold classifies trade  
deals as "unfair" if they  
cause some workers to  
lose their current jobs. But  
because all that freer trade  
does is to expand  
consumers' options, what  
the senator believes to be  
unfair is really consumer  
choice - consumer  
sovereignty - greater

freedom of consumers to  
spend their money as each  
of them deems best even  
if, in the process, they stop  
patronizing some particular  
producers.

So Sen. Feingold's  
accusation that freer trade  
is "unfair" simply because  
freer trade results in some  
workers losing particular  
jobs means that he must  
also regard as "unfair,"  
say, anti-smoking  
campaigns. After all, such  
campaigns tempt  
consumers away from  
buying cigarettes and,  
sadly, result in job losses  
among tobacco-industry  
workers.

12 October 2010

Editor, Christian Science  
Monitor

Dear Editor:

Pretending to expose the  
forces of darkness,  
President Obama alleges  
that GOP campaigns are  
funded, in part, with foreign  
money ("GOP buying  
Election 2010 with foreign  
cash? What Obama's  
talking about.," Oct. 11).

What's annoying about this  
allegation is not the  
insinuation that the same  
voters who are smart and  
discerning citizens when  
they encounter campaign

ads funded by Americans  
(with no ties to  
corporations!) become  
dumb and mesmerized  
dolts when exposed to ads  
funded by foreigners.  
Such contorted  
suggestions are par for the  
political course.

Instead, Mr. Obama  
overlooks the most  
corrupting source of  
campaign funds: innocent  
taxpayers. Because the  
typical political campaign is  
a series of promises to give  
to A what is taken from B,  
the most disturbing aspect  
of political campaigns is  
not the nationalities of  
people who voluntarily  
contribute their own money  
to help their favorite  
politicians. It is, instead,  
the use of money  
'contributed' involuntarily  
by B to help C buy the vote  
of A.

12 October 2010

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Rejecting Jeff Jacoby's  
argument for free trade,  
John Schreiber writes  
"Does he [Jacoby] want his  
kids to be greeters at Wal-  
Mart selling cheap Chinese  
goods or to be engineers  
or scientists designing a  
new product? That choice

is easy for me" (Letters, Oct. 12).

Mr. Schreiber has matters backwards. By buying products such as textiles, footwear, and luggage from China and other foreign countries, workers and resources in America are freed to work in fields such as bioengineering and artificial intelligence.

If we prevent the importation of "cheap Chinese goods," we'd achieve the bleak outcome of promoting in America industries that produce - what? - cheap AMERICAN goods. We Americans would pay higher prices for cheap goods and, more importantly, be denied many of the cutting-edge and challenging career opportunities that Mr. Schreiber and I (and, I'm sure, Mr. Jacoby) want for our children.

---

11 October 2010

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

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman says that the reason unemployment remains high is that "There never was a big expansion of government spending" during the current economic slump ("Hey, Small Spender," Oct. 11). More specifically, he alleges that increased spending at the federal level was "modest" while spending cuts by state and local governments were "drastic."

Not so. Inflation-adjusted spending at the federal level rose 29 percent between 2007 and 2009. The White House Office of Management & Budget estimates that this spending will rise another six percent in 2010 and three percent in 2011 - meaning that, since 2007,

Uncle Sam's spending is on course to rise by nearly 40 percent.

As for state and local governments, here's the headline of a July 14, 2010 news release from the U.S. Census Bureau: "State and Local Government Spending Increases by 6.5 Percent in 2008."

[<http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/governments/cb10-108.html>] Careful estimates of such spending for 2009 and 2010 show that it will rise even further. [<http://www.usgovernmentspending.com/#usgs302a>]

Mr. Krugman alleges that the belief that government is growing too fast is the result of "fact-free assertions and cooked numbers." Well, I offer here real facts, and leave it to your readers to judge who is doing the cooking.