



## 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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20 February 2010

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

To the Editor:

In his dismissal the Tea  
Partiers, Keith Ensminger –  
who embraces  
"Progressivism" – says  
that "They want  
government off their back,  
which means corporations  
are free to act in any way"  
(Letters, Feb. 20).

Mr. Ensminger's  
understanding hasn't  
progressed beyond 1930s-  
era New Dealism.  
Competition and consumer

choice, not government,  
are the chief means of  
ensuring that corporations  
act in the public interest.  
The "Progressivism" that  
he asserts is necessary to  
constrain corporations  
does quite the opposite.  
That naïve mindset has  
given us corporate  
bailouts, subsidies for  
corporate exports, tariffs  
that excuse corporations  
from having to compete  
with foreign rivals, and  
bureaucratic agencies that,  
pretending to work for the  
general welfare, more often  
than not are captured by  
the very corporations they  
are ostensibly meant to  
regulate.

If a corporation, without  
government protection,  
offers Mr. Ensminger a  
product he doesn't like, he  
can simply refuse to buy it.  
Government, though,  
doesn't offer; it commands.  
If he doesn't like what is he  
is commanded to do, he  
has no choice but to obey.  
What's so "progressive"  
about that?

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19 February 2010

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

To the Editor:

Randall Roark writes that the "'small government' is what got us into this financial mess in the first place" (Letters, Feb. 18). That's the myth convenient to everyone who is either dogmatically committed to expanding the size of government or who is too lazy to distinguish Republican rhetoric from reality (or both).

As Veronique de Rugy, my colleague at George Mason University's Mercatus Center, reports about federal regulations, there's been "a 10 percent increase in the number of high-cost rules since 2006, and a 70 percent increase since 2001. And at the end of 2007, another 3,882 rules were already at different stages of implementation, 757 of them targeting small businesses.

"Overall, the final outcome of this Republican regulation has been a significant increase in regulatory activity and cost since 2001. The number of

pages added to the Federal Register, which lists all new regulations, reached an all-time high of 78,090 in 2007, up from 64,438 in 2001.... Between fiscal year 2001 and fiscal year 2009, outlays on regulatory activities, adjusted for inflation, increased from \$26.4 billion to an estimated \$42.7 billion, or 62 percent."

[\[http://reason.com/archives/2008/12/10/bushs-regulatory-kiss-off\]](http://reason.com/archives/2008/12/10/bushs-regulatory-kiss-off)

And this increased regulatory activity was not limited to national-security issues. Commerce, Agriculture, and Treasury were some of the agencies whose regulatory engines were in hyperdrive.

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17 February 2010

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

To the Editor:

The U.S. government argues that China unjustly benefits by keeping the yuan undervalued ("U.S. Expected to Press China on Yuan," Feb. 17).

If this argument is correct, why doesn't China arrange for the yuan's value to be even lower - say, \$0? If the Chinese were simply to GIVE yuan to Americans, Americans' demands for Chinese exports would soar even higher. China's export industries would boom even more magnificently. And presumably (according the logic of Uncle Sam's argument) the Chinese would prosper even more splendidly, if more unfairly, at the expense of Americans.

Because the Chinese don't give the yuan away for free on foreign-exchange markets, they reveal themselves to be really not so clever and financially savvy after all!

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17 February 2010

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

To the Editor:

Uncle Sam argues that China unjustly gains economic benefits by keeping the yuan undervalued ("U.S. Expected to Press China on Yuan," Feb. 17). Bad argument.

When I was a boy, my school held fund-raising fairs. Using dollars, my classmates and I purchased as many fair 'tickets' as we wanted. We then used these tickets to buy whatever foods and toys were sold at the fair. Of course, some items cost more tickets than other items. Each ticket, though, exchanged for a fixed number of dollars.

Suppose my school had undervalued its fair tickets - that is, suppose it gave too many tickets in exchange for each dollar. Who'd be harmed? The answer is my school. By undervaluing its tickets, my school would have sold its fair items at prices below cost. Its revenue at the end of the day would have been lower than its costs.

Rather than raising money, my school would have lost money - and we students would have been wealthier as a result!

The same holds true for China. IF the yuan is undervalued, you can be sure that this policy drains wealth from China rather than builds wealth there - and makes Americans richer in the process.

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17 February 2010

Friends,

Here's a link to yesterday's CSPAN BookTV, which was a forum for a fascinating discussion of Adam Smith's The Wealth of Nations. The two guests are my GMU colleague Russ Roberts, and U. of Illinois professor Sam Fleischacker: <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/292116-1>

Sam Fleischacker, for those of you who don't, is a wonderful, world-leading Smith scholar, but (contrary to what you might expect) also a man of the left.

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17 February 2010

Friends,

My friend Bruce Caldwell, who is perhaps the world's

leading Hayek scholar, explains in today's Washington Post some reasons why Hayek's 1944 book, The Road to Serfdom, is again a best-seller:

[http://voices.washingtonpost.com/shortstack/2010/02/the\\_secret\\_behind\\_the\\_hot\\_sale.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/shortstack/2010/02/the_secret_behind_the_hot_sale.html)

BTW, the rap video at the top of the story was written and co-produced by my GMU colleague -- and fellow blogger at Cafe Hayek -- Russ Roberts.

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17 February 2010

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

Dear Editor:

You report today on a poll that finds, as your headline puts it, "Large majority opposes Supreme Court's decision on campaign financing."

Darn good thing that free speech is protected by a provision that can be undone only by a large SUPER-majority: the First amendment.

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16 February 2010

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

To the Editor:

Carlo Stagnaro  
appropriately pokes fun at  
the "peak oil" crowd who,  
with crude reasoning, for  
years have insisted that  
global petroleum  
production will max out  
"five years from now"  
(Letters, Feb. 17).

Only today,  
BusinessInsider.com  
reported the following fact -  
one which would not have  
surprised the late Julian  
Simon: "Exxon, who has  
been accused in the past  
of being too conservative in  
terms of exploration and  
development, has been  
finding more oil than it  
produces for each of the  
last 16 years, to the dismay  
of peak oil proponents."

<http://cafehayek.com/2010/02/julian-simon-would-not-be-surprised.html>

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16 February 2010

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

DeWayne Wickham wants  
the U.S. Senate to do away  
with the filibuster ("Senate

Democrats need to use  
'nuclear option' against  
GOP," Feb. 16). He  
alleges that the filibuster  
"flouts the basic idea of a  
majority-rule democracy"  
and that it "is a Faustian  
bargain that undermines  
the will of voters."

Mr. Wickham should brush  
up on history and civics.  
Americans have never  
submitted blindly to  
majority rule, even when  
that rule unambiguously  
reflects popular sentiment.  
The Senate, part of a  
bicameral Congress, is  
itself an institution explicitly  
meant to reduce the  
likelihood that any  
temporary passions of the  
majority are enacted into  
legislation. Countless  
other features of  
government have the same  
aim.

Would Mr. Wickham  
eliminate, along with the  
filibuster, the Presidential  
veto? How about judicial  
review? Or the Bill of  
Rights? Or the  
Constitution itself? Each of  
these institutions, along  
with many others, often -  
and rightly - protects  
individual liberty against  
majorities and the "will of  
voters."

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15 February 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Daniel Greenberg adapts  
famous morality tales for  
children into tales that  
show the unaccountability  
that allegedly infects  
modern market  
transactions ("A fox, a  
hound and other market  
tales," Feb. 15). Alas, the  
moral of his stories applies  
far more readily to politics  
than to private markets.

For example, tale #1 warns  
that bonuses paid in  
markets are unconnected  
to any merit; they're just  
monies stolen from the  
decent by the devious.  
Well, firms that pay  
employees arbitrarily,  
without any connection to  
productivity, don't long  
survive - unless, of course,  
propped up by  
government. And no  
institution is as arbitrary as  
is the state.

What measure of merit led  
Uncle Sam to take money  
from taxpayers and give it  
to General Motors? What  
principle of productivity  
justifies taxing citizens to  
pay for the virtually unused  
John Murtha Johnstown-  
Cambria County Airport?

What gauge of efficiency explains the up-to \$30 billion in direct subsidies paid annually to owners of farmland?

If Mr. Greenberg is keen on adapting classic morality tales to the modern world, he should turn his attention to the most gluttonous and irresponsible big bad wolf of all: government.