



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.

14 March 2010

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

To the Editor:

While applauding government-imposed national standards for schooling, you give no credence to the argument that each set of parents - rather than government - is in the best position and has the strongest incentives to determine whether or not their children are being educated well ("National School Standards, at Last," March 14). Indeed, the only persons you mention as parties interested in the

successful education of children are school superintendents, state governors, and members of Congress!

Not a single mention of parents - an omission that's more than passing strange.

With genuine school choice, procedures to determine if any school is performing well or poorly would be no more complicated, and every bit as effective, as is the procedure we use today to determine if, say, any particular supermarket is performing well or poorly. That procedure is competition among private, unsubsidized suppliers for customer dollars. If

consumer choice and competition serve well to maintain the quality of supermarkets (and of restaurants, and churches, and hotel chains, and...), then why do you think that tweaking, with national "standards," the subsidized and largely monopolistic government schools that haunt the land today will transform these dysfunctional institutions into effective ones?

13 March 2010

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

You applaud efforts by the Campaign for a Commercial-Free

Childhood to thwart "Big Business' attempts to turn [children] into consumers of junk food, junk toys, and junk entertainment" ("Bowling to corporate America, Judge Baker center loses face," March 13). While I admire these activists' zealous concern for children, I think it to be misdirected.

No business - "big" or otherwise - can, without special privileges from government, force children or parents to do anything. Disney doesn't imprison parents who don't let their kids watch the Disney Channel, and Little Debbie doesn't pull out a gun to shoot children who turn up their noses at her cupcakes.

So, a far better use of these activists' energies would be in a Campaign for a Government-Free Childhood. This campaign would work to protect children from truly harmful exercises of genuine power and judgment-impairing fraud - such as government schooling, minimum-wage legislation that prices many teenagers out of the labor market, and the obvious scam of each politician boasting the title "Honorable."

13 March 2010

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

To the Editor:

Asserting that competition by illegal immigrants for entry-level jobs keeps many teenagers unemployed, Peter Leidel writes "When I was a teenager growing up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., my first five jobs were mowing lawns, delivering newspapers, cleaning pools, pumping gas and busing tables. Many of those same jobs are now held by illegal immigrants" (Letters, March 13).

Mr. Leidel assumes that the number and kind of jobs are fixed, but this assumption is false. In 1950, for example, the size of the U.S. labor force was about 60 million and there were approximately 56.5 million jobs in America. Today the labor force is about 140 million and, even with the current high rate of unemployment, there are now approximately 126 million jobs in America - an increase in the number of jobs over six decades of 123 percent. Also, consider that specific jobs are often 'taken' not always

by a worker but by technology. In the case of Mr. Leidel's first jobs, today newspapers are frequently delivered on-line, gasoline is pumped at self-service stations, and swimming pools increasingly are cleaned robotically.

A larger labor force and technological advances do not reduce the number of jobs. For THAT to happen, government must intervene with obstructionist legislation such as the minimum-wage.

12 March 2010

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

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman thinks it wrong that health insurers don't cover pre-existing conditions ("Health Reform Myths," March 12). Apparently, he believes that each market participant should ignore the value of what she gets in exchange for what she gives.

I wonder if Prof. Krugman has thought through the implications of his belief. I propose a bet to test the soundness of his thinking. Let's flip a coin. If it lands

on its edge, I pay Prof. Krugman \$1; if it lands either heads or tails, he pays me \$1,000,000.

If he genuinely believes that health-insurers should ignore pre-existing conditions, then surely Prof. Krugman won't allow the pre-existing condition of the coin's shape to prevent him from accepting my bet.

11 March 2010

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

To the Editor:

A headline today reads "Obama Details Effort to Double Exports Over Five Years."

Translated headline:
"Obama Details Five-year Plan to Increase American Taxpayers' Subsidization of Foreigners' Consumption of U.S. Products."

11 March 2010

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

To the Editor:

One of today's headlines reads "Obama Details Effort to Double Exports Over Five Years."

Translation: "Obama Details Effort to Increase Corporate Welfare Over Five Years."

11 March 2010

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

Dear Editor:

George Will wisely warns against reason unreasonably applied ("As a progressive, Obama hews to the Wilsonian tradition," March 11). Pres. Obama and his ilk are guided by an irrational faith that human reason is so potent and encompassing that it permits the Best and the Brightest to consciously design society, or at least to successfully rearrange significant parts of society (such as the health-care industry).

This hubris is dangerous.

F.A. Hayek, defending reason reasonably applied, wrote that "the fundamental attitude of true individualism is one of humility toward the processes by which mankind has achieved things which have not been designed or understood by any individual and are indeed greater than individual minds. The great question at this moment is whether man's mind will be allowed to continue to grow as part of this process or whether human reason is to place itself in chains of its own making. What individualism teaches us is that society is greater than the individual only in so far

as it is free. In so far as it is controlled or directed, it is limited to the powers of the individual minds which control or direct it. If the presumption of the modern mind, which will not respect anything that is not consciously controlled by individual reason, does not learn in time where to stop, we may, as Edmund Burke warned us, 'be well assured that everything about us will dwindle by degrees, until at length our concerns are shrunk to the dimensions of our minds.'" [F.A. Hayek, "Individualism: True and False," Chapter 1 of Hayek, Individualism and Economic Order (U. Chicago Press, 1948)]

10 March 2010

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

You're correct that House ethics enforcers serve chiefly to excuse - and, hence, to enable - the crimes and follies of their fellow members of the House ("House ethics enforcers leave Congress mired in the muck," March 10). But why expect anything different?

Betraying the public trust comes as naturally to most politicians as breathing. For evidence, I offer as

Exhibit A Rep. Charles Rangel, and as Exhibit B Mr. Rangel's fellow House members who slapped him on his wrist ever so gently.

As Mark Twain wisely said, "To my mind Judas Iscariot was nothing but a low, mean, premature, Congressman."

10 March 2010

Sen. Bernard Sanders (I-VT)
Capitol Hill
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Sanders:

You accuse Wall Street Journal editorialists of being hypocritical in supporting tax cuts while simultaneously opposing what you call your "modest proposal" to give "a \$250 one-time payment [to] seniors struggling to cope with spiraling health-care costs" (Letters, March 10).

I'm tempted to make the consequentialist point that tax cuts are economically justified because they lower artificial obstacles to those who engage in productive activities and, thus, make nearly everyone, rich and poor, wealthier over time.

But I'd rather emphasize an ethical point, namely,

taking from Peter that which belongs to Peter is not remotely comparable to giving to Paul that which belongs to Peter. So it's not at all hypocritical to oppose robbing Peter while also opposing the forcible transfer of some of Peter's wealth to Paul. Instead, it's called consistency. And in this case it's also ethical.

9 March 2010

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

To the Editor:

Bret Stephens interprets Iraq's recent democratic election as proof that western modernity, with all of its marvels and freedoms, is dawning in that country ("Iraqis Embrace Democracy. Do We?" March 9). And, of course, the Great Liberator who rescued Iraqis from barbarism's clutch is none other than George W. Bush.

Mr. Stephens is mistaken. Democracy neither brings modernity nor is an essential element of it. The fountainhead of the western freedoms and institutions that Mr. Stephens rightly admires was the fractured and

overlapping jurisdictions that emerged in western Europe following the collapse of the Roman empire. The happy result was an inability of any one authority (say, a prince or a pope) to exercise complete sovereignty over the populace. From this fractured sovereignty the rights of man slowly sprung, and only much later did democracy as we know it develop.

Our democracy wasn't imposed by force of arms and could not have been so imposed. More importantly, what makes us modern and free is not that we trot off to polling places regularly to make collective decisions but, rather, that our institutions still afford spaces in which each of us, as individuals, is free to make private decisions without significant interference from either the state or any reigning superstitions.

8 March 2010

Mr. Barack Obama
President, Executive
Branch
United States Government
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.,
NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Obama:

Speaking today in Philadelphia, you said "Well, it is great to be back here in the Keystone State. It's even better to be out of Washington, D.C."

If you're sincere, I've a suggestion for you: resign your current job and offer your services to the law school at U. Penn. I'm sure that that Ivy League school will hire you onto its faculty at a top salary and – best of all - it'll get you out of Washington, D.C. for good!

A win-win.

8 March 2010

Mr. Barack Obama
President, Executive
Branch
United States Government
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.,
NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Obama:

CBS radio news this morning ran a clip of one of your recent speeches. In it, you criticize insurance companies because they "ration coverage according to who can pay and who can't."

My first thought was "not exactly; coverage is rationed according to who PAYS and who doesn't."

Ability to pay isn't the same thing as actually paying, and what insurers care about is the latter. Many folks - especially young adults - have the ability to pay but choose not to do so. They get no coverage.

But further pondering of your point leads me to look beyond such nit-picking to see fascinating possibilities. Not only insurers, but all producers who greedily refuse to supply persons who don't pay should be set aright. Now I'm sure that YOU don't ration the supply of the books you write according to any criteria as sordid as requiring people actually to pay for them. But our society is full of people less enlightened than you.

For example, the typical worker rations his labor services according to who pays and who doesn't. That must stop. Oh, and supermarkets! Every single one rations groceries according to who pays. Likewise with restaurants, clothing stores, home-builders, furniture makers, even lawyers! You name it, rationing is done according to who pays. Indeed, my own county government has been corrupted by this greedy attitude: if I don't

pay my taxes, the sheriff
takes my house -
effectively booting me out
of the county merely
because I didn't pay for its
services.

Preposterous!

I look forward to your
changing this selfish and
unfair system of rationing
that for too long now has
kept Americans
impoverished.