



**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.**

---

5 June 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Nicholas Kristof says that Americans who want lower taxes and less government regulation should study Pakistan, which he describes as "a low-tax laissez faire Eden" - and which also, of course, is a decrepit economy and society ("Our Fantasy Nation?" June 5). Never mind that, as University of Chicago law professor Todd Henderson notes, Pakistan ranks near the bottom of indices of economic freedom. Forget

also that Pakistan is dominated by the military and benighted by liberty-suffocating superstitions.

Straw-man games such as the one Mr. Kristof plays are too easy. Would anyone be persuaded, for example, if I wrote (paraphrasing his opening line) "With MoveOn.org progressives and many Democrats balking at reducing the role of government, let me offer them an example of a nation that lives up to their ideals" - and then presented as a shining example of a 'progressive' society North Korea? North Korea's government, after all, offers cradle-to-grave economic supervision and protection

of its citizens; incomes in North Korea are quite equal; and the government there actively directs the economy.

Would Mr. Kristof find the superficial similarities between some preferred policies of 'progressives' and the reality of North Korean society to be a serious reason to reconsider his 'progressive' beliefs? Of course - and rightly - not. And for the same reason no one should take seriously Mr. Kristof's absurd equation of Pakistan with an America in which people enjoy lower taxes and fewer government regulations.

---

5 June 2011

Friends,

John Stossel devotes an entire show to the work and insights of my great colleague Walter Williams:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjexfiF25Gk> pt. 1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0OYKD18pic> pt. 2

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWefn5rMIsU> pt. 3

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vnS0gDkfxA&feature=related> pt. 4

---

4 June 2011

Editor, The Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Critical of your argument that "cigar bars should be an exception to smoking bans in public places," Andrew Rouse writes that "The Globe ignores the fact that allowing cigar bars condones job sites where workers are expected to be exposed to carcinogens as a condition of employment. No worker should have to work in such conditions" (Letters, June 4).

News flash to Mr. Rouse: workers are intelligent beings. The existence of

cigar bars does not require that any worker MUST work "in such conditions." Persons who wish to work in cigar bars can do so, while those who do not do not. Problem solved.

It won't do, by the way, for Mr. Rouse to reply that some people have no real choice but to work in cigar bars. Such a claim would imply that these workers' skills are so specific to cigar bars that their other employment options, if any, are sufficiently ghastly that these workers prefer to toil in cigar bars. Yet Mr. Rouse - posing as a champion of workers - wants to force them to endure an option that, as they see it, is even worse than (what Mr. Rouse assumes to be) the hell of working in cigar bars.

How, exactly, would cigar-bar workers be helped by this outcome?

---

2 June 2011

Ms. Diane Sawyer, Anchor  
ABC World News Tonight  
New York, NY

Dear Ms. Sawyer:

ABC's webpage announcing the launch of your "Made in America Pledge" is error-ridden from start to finish ("Made

in America' Pledge: What is American-Made in Your Home?"). It's a mash-up of factual errors (e.g., imports today account for far less than 60 percent of "what we buy"; the correct figure is about 15 percent); baseless presumptions (e.g., you're wrong to insinuate that the decline in U.S. manufacturing employment over the past 70 years is ominous); and long-discredited economics (e.g., contrary to your claim, no new jobs on net will be created in the U.S. if Americans reduce their purchases of imports and start buying more American-made outputs).

But at least you and your colleagues at ABC request feedback from Americans who go through their homes observing the "Made in" labels on their household items. I'll be among those who send such feedback, hoping to persuade you that stirring up hysteria about the fact that Americans buy lots of furniture and consumer electronics from abroad is irresponsible, misleading, and potentially harmful to Americans' hope for continued prosperity.

---

31 May 31, 2011

Wall Street Journal Essay

Writing recently in the Washington Post, environmental guru Bill McKibben asserted that the number and severity of recent weather events, such as the tornado in Joplin, Mo., are too great not to be the result of fossil-fuel induced climate change. He suggested that government's failure to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases will result in more violent weather and weather-related deaths in the future.

And pointing to the tragedy in Joplin, Mr. McKibben summarily dismissed the idea that, if climate change really is occurring, human beings can successfully adapt to it.

There's one problem with this global-warming chicken little-ism. It has little to do with reality. National Weather Service data on weather-related fatalities since 1940 show that the risks of Americans being killed by violent weather have fallen significantly over the past 70 years.

The annual number of deaths caused by tornadoes, floods and hurricanes, of course, varies. For example, the number of persons killed by these weather events in

1972 was 703 while the number killed in 1988 was 72. But amid this variance is a clear trend: The number of weather-related fatalities, especially since 1980, has dropped dramatically.

For the 30-year span of 1980-2009, the average annual number of Americans killed by tornadoes, floods and hurricanes was 194—fully one-third fewer deaths each year than during the 1940-1979 period. The average annual number of deaths for the years 1980-2009 falls even further, to 160 from 194, if we exclude the deaths attributed to Hurricane Katrina, most of which were caused by a levee that breached on the day after the storm struck land.

This decline in the absolute number of deaths caused by tornadoes, floods and hurricanes is even more impressive considering that the population of the United States more than doubled over these years—to 308 million in 2010 from 132 million in 1940.

Contrary to what many environmentalists would have us believe, Americans are increasingly less likely to be killed by

severe weather. Moreover, because of modern industrial and technological advances—radar, stronger yet lighter building materials, more reliable electronic warning devices, and longer-lasting packaged foods—we are better protected from nature's fury today than at any other time in human history. We do adapt.

Of course, this happy trend might not continue. Maybe the allegedly devastating consequences of our "addiction" to fossil fuels, and the rapid economic growth these fuels make possible, will soon catch up with us. Maybe the future will be more deadly.

I reject this pessimism. I do so because economics and history teach that human beings in market economies have proven remarkably creative and resourceful in overcoming challenges. And there's no reason to think that this creativity and resourcefulness will fail us in the face of climate change.

Since 1950 there have been 57 confirmed F5 tornadoes, with winds between 261–318 miles per hour, in the U.S. Of those, five struck in 1953; six in 1974. So far this year

there have been four F5 tornadoes in the U.S., including the devastating storm that killed more than 130 people in Joplin on May 22. F5 tornadoes are massive, terrifying and deadly. But they generally touch down in unpopulated areas, thus going unnoticed. The tragedy of Joplin and other tornadoes this year is that they touched down in populated areas, causing great loss of life. Yet if these storms had struck even 20 years ago there would have been far more deaths.

So confident am I that the number of deaths from violent storms will continue to decline that I challenge Mr. McKibben—or Al Gore, Paul Krugman, or any other climate-change doomsayer—to put his wealth where his words are. I'll bet \$10,000 that the average annual number of Americans killed by tornadoes, floods and hurricanes will fall over the next 20 years. Specifically, I'll bet that the average annual number of Americans killed by these violent weather events from 2011 through 2030 will be lower than it was from 1991 through 2010.

If environmentalists really are convinced that climate change inevitably makes

life on Earth more lethal, this bet for them is a no-brainer. They can position themselves to earn a cool 10 grand while demonstrating to a still-skeptical American public the seriousness of their convictions.

But if no one accepts my bet, what would that fact say about how seriously Americans should treat climate-change doomsaying?

Do I have any takers?