



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux

Chairman, Department of Economics

George Mason University

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.

1 July 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Joe Califano and Bill Bennett - the éminences grises of American scolds and busybodies - predict that if drugs were legalized "needle parks" would sprout up like weeds throughout America, each one possibly becoming "a grotesque tourist attraction" ("Do We Really Want a 'Needle Park' on American Soil?" July 1). Let's assume that this prediction is accurate. And let's generously grant also the

accuracy of many of Califano's and Bennett's other dire predictions.

We must still ask, as compared to what? The "what" includes not only whatever difficult-to-measure (but easy to fantasize about) blessings we enjoy as a result of the 'war on drugs'; the "what" includes also the current observable reality of this 'war.'

Would needle parks be worse than the lethal violence that is an artifact of the drug war? (Note that salespeople and delivery drivers for the likes of the Miller Brewing Co. and the Ernest & Julio Gallo Winery do not today, unlike alcohol

suppliers during Prohibition, pack heat.) Would the exercise by some people of the freedom to dissipate their lives with drugs be more wicked than the widespread practice of civil asset forfeiture - a lawless 'legal' maneuver, used mainly in the 'war on drugs,' by which state and local governments and Uncle Sam routinely steal the property of people merely SUSPECTED (and often never convicted) of committing drug offenses?

And would an increase in health problems caused by drug use be more lamentable than the infamous 'drug war' exception to the Fourth

amendment - an exception that supplies to government officials the most dangerously addictive substance of all: power?

Anyone who answers 'yes' to these questions suffers hallucinations far more bizarre than those induced by LSD or anything else that can be purchased easily today in any city or town in America.

29 June 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Dana Milbank rightly ridicules Barack Obama for changing his tune on same-sex marriage ("On same-sex marriage, Obama still has cold feet," June 29). Mr. Obama was once for it, but now that he's a politician seeking re-election on the national stage, Pres. Obama is against it.

Pathetic and unprincipled? Yes. Surprising? No.

Mr. Obama is a standard-issue politician: greedy for gaudy glory. H.L. Mencken's observation about Teddy Roosevelt applies perfectly to Barack Obama: "What ailed him was the fact that his lust for glory, when it came to a struggle, was always vastly more powerful than his lust for the eternal verities. Tempted sufficiently, he would sacrifice anything and everything to get applause." [H.L. Mencken, "Roosevelt I," in H.L. Mencken, ed., *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 242]

27 June 2011

Mr. Bill Jordan, President
UAW Local 599
812 Leith St.
Flint, MI 48505

Dear Mr. Jordan:

The blog *Carpe Diem* today features a photo of a sign in the parking lot of your Michigan headquarters. That sign reads: "Only American-Union Made Automobiles, Trucks & Motorcycles Are Allowed In This Parking Lot. Violators Will Be Towed."

You seek to punish those who, by purchasing substitutes for the vehicles that your members currently are employed to produce, reduce the demand for unionized autoworkers and, thereby, destroy some jobs in unionized U.S. auto plants.

Of course, you may exclude from your parking lot whomever you wish, for whatever reasons you wish. But I'm curious: do you also threaten to tow away old American-made automobiles? The person who drives, say, a 1991 Buick Regal - whether he bought it new 20 years ago or bought it used yesterday - opts, no less than does the person who drives a

2011 Toyota Camry, NOT to buy a newly made American automobile. Both persons spend their money now in ways that keep demand for new American-made automobiles lower than it would otherwise be. The spending choices of the owner of the 1991 Buick harm your members no less than - and for exactly the same reasons as - do the spending choices of the owner of the 2011 Toyota.

In light of this reality, do you and your members want Uncle Sam to impose a special tax on Americans who buy used cars? How about a tax on each American who keeps the same automobile for, say, more than five years? After all, someone who keeps her car in good repair and, as a result, does not buy a new car every few years contributes to the decline of the U.S. auto industry in precisely the same way as does the most fanatical buyer of shiny new Volkswagens or Hondas.

27 June 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Today's letters on the public's pathetic lack of knowledge of basic economics combines with today's letters on the awful unintended consequences of the 'drug war' to remind me of this salient observation from economist Deirdre McCloskey's 2002 monograph, *The Secret Sins of Economics*:

"It's amazing that most professors and journalists since about 1900 have not even HEARD of the arguments against turning the economy over to police and jailers and bureaucrats, and are scandalized when some boorish Chicago-School economist comes along and suggests that pot should be legalized and national borders opened and government schools made to compete with each other" [original emphasis]. [Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Secret Sins of Economics* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002), p. 20; downloadable here:

http://www.prickly-paradigm.com/sites/default/files/McCloskey_Paradigm_4.pdf]

Indeed. We economists have poorly explained to non-economists why the

market's invisible hand, even with all its imperfections, is far preferable to the state's visible fist, even with its faux-velvet glove.