



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 August 2011

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Contra Jeff Jacoby, Berl Hartman believes that the new government-imposed fuel-economy standard of 54.5 mpg is realistic because "many leading carmakers ... endorsed the new standards. Chrysler said it could use 'plain-vanilla technology' to meet the new standards, and all agreed that technology already in the pipeline could suffice" (Letters, Aug. 14).

Before rejecting Mr. Jacoby's argument, Mr. Hartman should ask why some "leading carmakers" endorse this mandate. If such a magnificent increase in fuel economy is

easily and cost-effectively achieved, government no more has to force automakers to offer it than government has to force automakers to offer air-conditioning, cup holders, and other amenities that consumers willingly buy.

Perhaps this 'endorsement' is simply the simpering "yes, massa" of corporate executives now servile to leviathan.

Or maybe this support reflects some automakers' realization that satisfying this mandate will be more costly for their competitors than for them - and, hence, that the mandate will increase the market power of these supportive automakers by differentially burdening, and perhaps even bankrupting, some of their rivals.

Either way, the very statement from Chrysler that Mr. Hartman finds so reassuring should plant in him suspicion of Chrysler's motives.

11 August 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Elizabeth Newton opines that "In a perfectly functioning economic world, all consumers would receive perfect education about good nutrition and then simultaneously demand that fast-food companies and grocery stores start offering healthy options, thus forcing Big Food to supply what the people demand. Until that happens, we need regulation of Nestlé,

Monsanto, McDonald's and the rest of the moguls that dictate our diets" (Letters, Aug. 11).

If economic arrogance were calories, Ms. Newton's letter would make a Baconator burger seem like a broccoli floret.

She assumes that "Big Food" earns higher profits by selling products that consumers really don't want than by selling products that consumers really do want. This startling proposition requires for its justification more than Ms. Newton's presumption that she knows other people's true preferences better than do those people themselves, and better than do the entrepreneurs who, in competitive markets, earn their livings by satisfying those preferences.

In fact, the likes of Ms. Newton are simply pests preening as know-it-all "Progressives." Her superciliousness highlights the truth of H.L. Mencken's observation that "one man who minds his own business is more valuable to the world than 10,000 cocksure moralists." [H.L. Mencken, "Another Long-Awaited Book" (1926), reprinted on pages 346-349 of Mencken, A Second Mencken Chrestomathy (New York: Knopf, 1995); quotation is on page 348]

10 August 2011

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
1211 6th Ave.

New York, NY 10036

Dear Editor:

U.S. Senators Mary Landrieu (D-LA) and Patty Murray (D-WA) are eager to "create jobs" by spending other people's money on a slew of top-down, bureaucrat-directed programs aimed at "closing the skills gap" ("How to Close the Skills Gap," August 10).

My, how creative.

Overlook the questionable record of government efforts to educate children and retrain workers. Ask instead: Why should anyone pay attention to what politicians say about job creation? In this case, Ms. Landrieu has been in politics since she was 25 years old; Ms. Murray - after stints as a pre-school teacher and as an environmental and education activist - has been in politics since she was 35. Apparently, the only qualification these women have to pronounce in your pages on the subject of job creation is their success at winning lofty political offices.

If the likes of Ms. Landrieu and Ms. Murray were to offer advice on how to repair your collapsed roof or on how to rid your house of termites, they'd be seen immediately for the imposters that they are. But when it comes to economics, politicians' statements sadly are taken as serious contributions to the public discourse even though - as is the case in your pages

today - those statements reflect a quality of thinking that would embarrass a twelve-year-old.

9 August 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Eugene Robinson blames the S&P's downgrading of Uncle Sam's credit on the protracted refusal (until the very end) by Uncle Sam - a licentious borrower - to borrow even more ("A downgrade's GOP fingerprints," August 9). Mr. Robinson scolds, "If you threaten not to pay your bills, people will - and should - take you seriously."

Why is the first remotely serious effort in ages to oblige government not to borrow beyond a certain limit portrayed as fiscal imprudence?

Asked differently, why would creditors be spooked by a debtor's 'threat' to honor his vow to keep his debt from growing? Creditors, it seems, would APPLAUD the keeping of such a vow.

The downgrade is far more plausibly a consequence of Uncle Sam breaking that vow - and doing so in a way that reveals his cowardly refusal, at the end of the day, to address his addiction to spending greater and greater sums of

money now and passing the bills
on to taxpayers later.