



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.

23 March 2012

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

Dear Editor:

Export-Import Bank chairman Fred Hochberg insists that the government agency he heads is no dispenser of corporate welfare because "over the past five years, the bank has generated \$1.9 billion in surpluses for U.S. taxpayers" (Letters, March 23).

If these profits are genuine (rather than accounting illusions conjured by creative government cost shifting), then Mr. Hochberg need not worry

that Uncle Sam's reluctance to fund the bank will put an end to it and its allegedly worthwhile work. An entity so profitable will be eagerly acquired and operated by private investors.

In fact, why doesn't Mr. Hochberg himself - rather than grumble about Congress's hesitance to renew the bank's funding - organize a group of investors to take the Ex-Im Bank private? Should he do so, taxpayers will be spared the expense; Mr. Hochberg and his investment partners will earn big bucks; and the U.S. economy will continue to reap the impressive benefits that Mr. Hochberg so ardently proclaims are

the product of the bank's operations.

It'd be a win-win!

22 March 2012

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

Dear Editor:

George Will ends his lovely ode to creative destruction - closes his case that such dynamic competition is necessarily open-ended and produces progress in unpredictable patterns - thusly: "Professional coordinators, a.k.a. bureaucracies, are dismayed. Good."

As the late Baldy Harper (founder of the Institute for Humane Studies, now at my home institution of George Mason U.) wrote "If the planner could plan discovery for others, he probably would have made that discovery himself in the first place. If he is more able in this respect than the others, he is wasting his time not to do it himself; if he is less able, he can hardly plan it for others who are more able than he is. The notion that a blueprint for discovery can be drawn in advance is to assert that the planner somehow has the power to scrutinize the inscrutable, or fathom the unfathomable."*

Regrettably, politicians (particularly those of a "Progressive" stripe) are too prone to fancy that their success at winning elections somehow bestows upon them supernatural abilities to do what Harper explains, and history proves, can't be done - namely, plan progress. Solyndra is only the most recent of failed monuments to the confusion of hubris for vision.

21 March 2012

Editor, The New York Times

620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

Dear Editor:

Lawrence Korb feels that a military draft would "have forced the American people to ask questions about the necessity for, or potential costs of, the wars, and likely would have prevented the killings of which Sergeant Bales is accused" - or, as the title of his essay reads: "A Draft Would Force Us to Face Reality" (March 21).

Not so fast. Overlook the depravity of forcing young people to die in battle as a means of pressuring their elders to avoid dubious wars. The draft - by staffing the military with conscripts paid less than the wages they'd earn in a volunteer force - in fact RELIEVES most taxpayers of much of the cost of war. A disproportionate share of war's cost, therefore, is foisted onto draftees whose wages are kept artificially low. With much of the cost of war thus hidden from politicians and taxpayers, the likely result is more frequent war and greater casualties

For evidence look no further than America's war in Vietnam. Conscription then didn't prevent Uncle

Sam from spending nearly a decade fighting for a 'cause' that few back home understood. Nor did it prevent massacres such as that at Mai Lai. And that fighting was far more lethal to U.S. soldiers than is today's 'war on terror.' In Vietnam, an average of 26 Americans died daily; in today's war in the Middle East, that number is 1.7 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_military_casualties_of_war#Wars_ranked_by_total_number_of_US_military_deaths] - meaning that soldiering for the Pentagon during draft-era Vietnam was 15 times more likely to be fatal than is soldiering for the Pentagon today.

20 March 2012

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

Dear Editor:

You report that "The Commerce Department has decided to impose tariffs on solar panels imported from China after concluding that the Chinese government provided illegal export subsidies to manufacturers there" ("U.S. to Place Tariffs on Solar Panels From China," March 20).

Let's get this straight. If Uncle Sam raises our taxes to subsidize our access to solar energy, that's noble government intervention that (if it isn't stopped by Cro-Magnon conservatives) will produce in America radiant benefits – but if Beijing raises the Chinese people's taxes to subsidize our access to solar energy, that's noxious government intervention that (if it isn't stopped by "Progressive" politicians) will produce in America ruinous harm.

Hmm.... I fear that I'm insufficiently enlightened to grasp this logic.

20 March 2012

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

Dear Editor:

You report that some researchers "have shown that the price savings that U.S. factories have realized from outsourcing have incorrectly shown up as gains in U.S. output and productivity" ("Economists offer more pessimistic view on manufacturing in upcoming report," March 20).

There's nothing incorrect about counting such gains from trade as gains in output and productivity. Adam Smith himself explicitly and correctly identified the expansion of markets through trade as a major source of rising productivity.

Suppose that you've traditionally used in-house workers to repair your printing presses. If you today hire, at a lower cost, an outside firm to do these repairs, your company's productivity rises: you produce the same output while using fewer inputs. And it makes no difference whatsoever to any measure of your productivity (or to the resulting potential growth of the U.S. economy) if the outside firm whose repair services you 'import' into your factories is located in Virginia or in Vietnam.

19 March 2012

Editor, Lubbock Avalanche
Journal

Dear Editor:

Dismayed at Rev. Pat Robertson's call to legalize marijuana, Nelson Spear objects that "I have not encountered anyone whose success in life was enhanced by the use of

marijuana or any other recreational drug. On the other hand, I have encountered hundreds whose lives were decimated by the use of marijuana" (Letters, March 18).

Indeed. But the same is true for alcohol - another drug that ruins many lives and contributes to no one's "success in life."

In a move very similar to Mr. Robertson's, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. - a life-long teetotaler and long-time proponent of alcohol prohibition - turned against prohibition in 1932 after witnessing its actual effects. While "not unmindful" that prohibition likely prevented some people from becoming drunkards, Mr. Rockefeller realized that "these benefits, as important and far reaching as they are, are more than outweighed by the evils that have developed and flourished since its [prohibition's] adoption." [Letter from J.D. Rockefeller, Jr., to Nicholas Murray Butler, reprinted in the New York Times, June 7, 1932] To prevent these evils, Mr. Rockefeller called for prohibition's repeal.

Too bad that too few people realize - as does the Rev. Robertson today,

and as did Mr. Rockefeller
80 years ago - that
government cannot prohibit
private behaviors without
unleashing consequences
far worse than those of the
prohibited behaviors
themselves.