



## Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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3 June 2012

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

Dear Editor:

Frank Bruni applauds Mayor Bloomberg's proposal to ban the sale of large sugary drinks ("Trimming a Fat City," June 3). H.L. Mencken, in contrast, would slam Bloomberg's officiousness for what it is: a modern manifestation of the Puritanism that has long contaminated life in these United States.

Mencken's description of a 1920s-era Puritan applies

perfectly to Michael Bloomberg, Frank Bruni, and the countless other Puritans today who, like Puritans of the past, self-gratify their egos by stalking, pestering, and shackling innocent people: "With the best intentions in the world he cannot rid himself of the delusion that his duty to save us from our sins - i.e., from the non-Puritanical acts that we delight in - is paramount to his duty to let us be happy in our own way." [H.L. Mencken, *Notes on Democracy* (New York: Dissident Books, 2009 [1926]), p. 133]

2 June 2012

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

Dear Editor:

Harvard Prof. Walter Willett, M.D., writes that "New York City's plan to limit the serving size of soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages sold at restaurants, movie theaters and street carts is well justified by solid evidence" (Letters, June 2).

No it's not.

Even if we grant Dr. Willett's unscientific premise that Jones is right to arrogantly presume that Smith's dietary choices are 'wrong' for Smith, the

evidence that Dr. Willett mentions says absolutely nothing about the wisdom of deploying government power to interfere with Smith's choices.

How likely is government to abuse its power to override individuals' freedom of choice? What unintended consequences might occur if government power is expanded? And most importantly, how valuable to Smith - and to Smith's fellow citizens - is Smith's freedom to choose? No amount of medical data, no matter how "solid," addresses, and much less answers, these and similar vital questions about the proper role of government.

1 June 2012

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Gary Nudd pleads with airline passengers to "play by the rules" when storing carry-on luggage (Letters, June 1). Makes sense. But a little-known fact that helps to explain today's chaotic scramble for overhead-bin space was reported recently by Politico: "Two years ago, [U.S. Sen. Charles] Schumer got five big airlines to pledge that they wouldn't charge

passengers to stow carry-on bags in overhead bins."

Overhead-bin space is scarce and, hence, valuable. So some airlines sensibly experimented with charging for its use. Government intervention, though, stopped this scarce commodity from being allocated by prices. As any Econ 101 student will tell you, the result is a costly free-for-all in which bin space is allocated far more arbitrary - on a first-come, first-served basis - than would be the case if allocation were guided instead by prices.

Sen. Schumer likely imagines that by ridding reality of one of scarcity's symptoms - prices - he miraculously rids reality of scarcity itself. Today's mad and frustrating clambering for space in overhead bins, however, proves that Sen. Schumer is deluded.

30 May 2012

Editor, Los Angeles Times

Dear Editor:

Bob Snodgrass writes that "The U.S. is too big for a single economic policy. We must permit regional policy differences; for example, maybe Texas

and other red states want to subsidize oil companies and professional sports, while blue states want to subsidize education, healthcare and libraries" (Letters, May 30). Mr. Snodgrass is on to something, although he doesn't go far enough.

Even better than permitting regional policy differences is permitting individual policy differences. An individual who wants to subsidize oil companies with his own money should be free to do so; those of us who oppose such subsidies should be free not to do so. A person who thinks that subsidized health-care is vital to her community should be at liberty to support it in whatever ways she wishes (including persuading others to join her), while people who think differently should be free to withhold support.

Once we recognize, as Mr. Snodgrass does, that different people have different demands, wishes, hopes, and expectations, the presumption should run strongly in favor of freedom of individual, rather than merely of "regional," choice.