

2012 ISSUE

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## Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

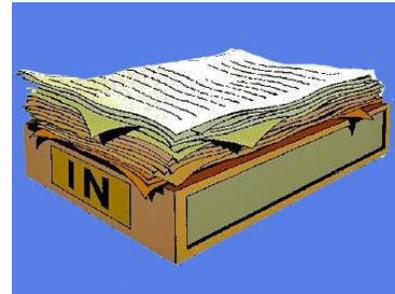
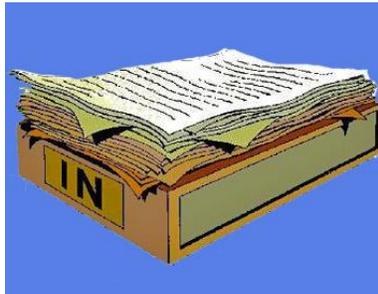
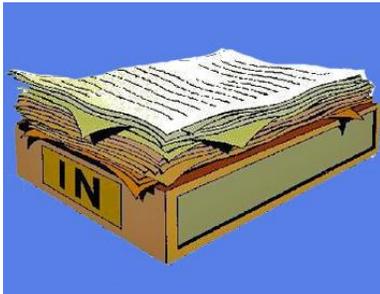
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**Disclaimer:** The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed, but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet, and if they are, they may require registration or subscription to access. Some of the articles being commented on are syndicated, therefore, they may also have appeared in other publications.

9 November 2012

Editor, CBS

Dear Editor:

Imagine Saturday Night Live spoofing Mayor Michael Bloomberg's fanatical itch to restrict New Yorkers' diets to foods that Mr. Bloomberg divines to be appropriate. An hilarious skit would feature a Mayor Mike lookalike standing in a homeless shelter and ordering heavily armed policemen to turn away private citizens who come to donate food. The "Mayor" would calmly explain to hungry shelter residents that the City hasn't the resources to inspect donated foods to ensure that the fat, salt, and fiber contents of these foods meet the Mayor's exacting standards. So no donating food to hungry New Yorkers!

The audience laughter would be uproarious.

The question, though, is raised: How does Saturday Night Live spoof Mayor Bloomberg's actual - his real; factual; no joke; don't laugh; you can't make this stuff up - ban on food donations to homeless shelters because he worries that such food might have too much fat, too much salt, or too little fiber ("Bloomberg Strikes Again: NYC Bans Food Donations To The Homeless," March 19, 2012)?

Reality as absurd as a comedy skit is tragic.

Sincerely,  
Donald J. Boudreaux

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7 November 2012

Editor, Denver Post

Dear Editor:

Tom Zwirlein, director of the Southern Colorado Economic Forum, says of this summer's Waldo Canyon fire - the most destructive in Colorado history - that "There are some good things that could happen. It could help us out quite a bit" ("Waldo Canyon fire could bring economic benefits," Nov. 6). Your report continues: "Rebuilding will generate about 436 net new jobs, \$103 million in new income and \$3.9 million in sales and use taxes for local governments over the next five years, the forum estimates."

If destroyed homes and ruined infrastructure generate real economic blessings, then citizens of communities and countries with plentiful, excellent, and intact housing and infrastructure should lament their misfortune. After all, by having on hand large stocks of productive assets that no longer need to be built, these people are denied the additional jobs, income, and taxes that the lucky citizens of southern Colorado will now enjoy, courtesy of a devastating fire.

Sincerely,  
Donald J. Boudreaux

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12 November 2012

Editor, New York Post

Dear Editor:

Contrary to some of your readers' comments, rationing gasoline according to whether a license tag ends in an odd or even number depending on the day of the week will not reduce the length of lines at gasoline stations (Letters, Nov. 12).

Suppose that gasoline is in such short supply - and is priced such - that on each day over an eight-day span an average of 1,000 motorists are willing to wait in line for 30 minutes or longer to buy gasoline. Without the odd-even rationing scheme, on each day roughly 500 queuing motorists will be "evens" and 500 will be "odds." Over the entire eight-day span 4,000 "evens" and 4,000 "odds" queue up for a half-hour or longer for gasoline.

Because an "odd-even" rationing scheme does nothing to increase supplies or to reduce motorists' willingness to wait in line, it changes nothing of significance. With such a scheme, it remains the case that, over that eight-day span, 4,000 "evens" and 4,000 "odds" are willing to queue up in order to fill up. An "odd-even" rationing scheme merely ensures that on each of the four "even" days the 1,000 queuing motorists are all "evens," while on each of the four "odd" days the 1,000 queuing motorists are all "odds." The total amount of queuing over this span of days remains unchanged.

Political parlor tricks such as implementing odd-even rationing solve nothing. Matters will improve only by freeing prices to rise in order to more sensibly allocate existing supplies and, importantly, to entice entrepreneurs to increase supplies.

Sincerely,  
Donald J. Boudreaux

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14 November 2012

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

Dear Editor:

In the 15th century China's Ming rulers sealed that nation off from ocean-going trade - a policy that included cutting off the tongues of master shipbuilders to ensure that no new sea-worthy freighters could be built.\* The resulting blow to China's economic dynamism and growth was cataclysmic.

While China's policy today of banning super-sized freighters from Chinese ports is far less extreme, the effect will be in the same direction ("Beijing Wields Big Stick Against Megaships," Nov. 14). To protect a politically powerful clique (in this case, state-controlled shippers), Beijing obstructs the Chinese people's economic integration with the rest world and, thereby, keeps their standard of living lower than it would otherwise be.

And a great irony is that, by artificially reducing the volume of freight handled at Chinese ports daily, this policy necessarily diminishes Chinese exports. This depressing effect will go unnoticed by American protectionists, such as Senators Lindsey Graham and Chuck Schumer, as they persistently screech out accusations that Beijing artificially STIMULATES Chinese exports.

Sincerely,  
Donald J. Boudreaux

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16 November 2012

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

Dear Editor:

Thanks for quoting Janet Daley's important observation that "The United States has now acquired an electorally powerful liberal bourgeoisie who are convinced, as their European counterparts have been for several generations, in spite of all evidence to the

contrary, that public spending is inherently virtuous, that poverty can be cured by penalising wealth creation, and that government intervention can engineer social 'fairness'" ("Notable & Quotable," Nov. 15.)

I've only one quibble: those convinced that consensual capitalist acts are dangerous (and perhaps rather ethically icky) unless curtailed, constrained, channeled, modified, taxed, or otherwise heavily controlled by government are neither liberal nor bourgeois.

Statists' appropriation in the English-speaking world of the term "liberal" is well known.\* Less well known is the account - told now by Deirdre McCloskey\*\* - of how our prosperity owes much to the extensive admiration of the bourgeoisie. Not until about 300 years ago, when bourgeois virtues and pursuits first came to be regarded as dignified rather than as contemptible, were markets and innovationism unleashed to work their wonders at dramatically raising living standards, even for the poorest.

The problem today is precisely that the values of the liberal bourgeoisie are being displaced by those of an illiberal aristocracy of intellectually glib professors, pundits, politicians, and entertainment glitterati. These "Progressives" not only deeply misunderstand the origin, nature, and role of markets, but also naively - and illiberally - forget that centralized power created with good intentions too often produces bad results.

Sincerely,  
Donald J. Boudreaux

