



## Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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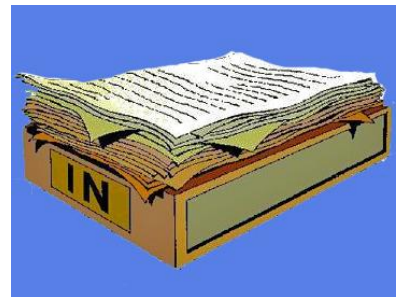
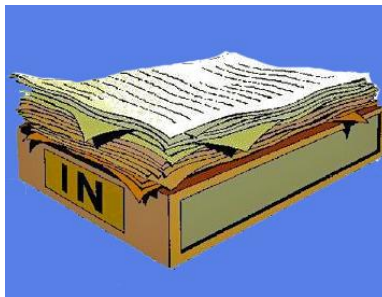
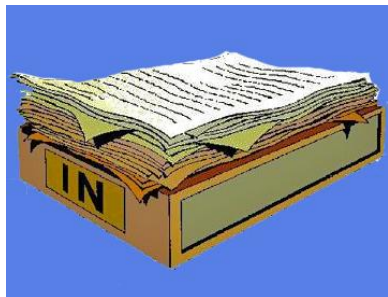
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**Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed, but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet, 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.**

20 May 2013

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

Dear Editor:

Gordon Crovitz reports that Pres. Obama's "longtime adviser David Axelrod last week blamed a too-big government for the scandals: 'Part of being president is that there's so much beneath you that you can't know because the government is so vast'" ("Big Government Loses Control," May 20).

Although the reality identified by Mr. Alexrod is inescapable, it is no excuse when offered by people - such as Messrs. Obama and Alexrod - who repeatedly insist that proponents of keeping the size and scope of government strictly limited exaggerate big-government's dangers.

One cannot legitimately, when seeking to expand state power, assure us that such power will be exercised with sufficient attentiveness to avoid abuse, but then - when reality exposes those assurances as fanciful - plead innocent by noting that the degree of attentiveness necessary to prevent abuse is humanly impossible.

Sincerely,  
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and  
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21 May 2013

Editor, Christian Science Monitor

Dear Editor:

To your reader who opposes amnesty for undocumented immigrants – and, indeed, to all who oppose policies to normalize life in America for those immigrants – I ask a question (Letters, May 21): Should President Obama and Sarah Palin be imprisoned?

Both Mr. Obama and Ms. Palin admit to having smoked marijuana in the past. Smoking marijuana is a criminal offense carrying a punishment of prison time, yet these scofflaws today walk freely amongst us, having violated our laws and paid no penalty for their offense! And, of course, what's true for Mr. Obama and Ms. Palin is true for many other famous people, such as George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jon Bon Jovi, and Maya Angelou. More generally, an estimated 70 million Americans, famous and not, have smoked pot, with only a tiny fraction ever being prosecuted for doing so. The list of such criminals who brashly walk in our midst unpunished for their blatant disregard of our duly enacted laws is very long.

I don't really propose locking up Barack Obama, Sarah Palin, Maya Angelou or anyone else for having used illegal drugs. But it's worth pointing out that we in fact routinely grant such people amnesty for their offenses. Why are poor Hispanics not accorded the same humane treatment for committing "crimes" that are equally as victimless as are the drug-taking "crimes" committed in the past by presidents, governors, celebrated artists, and, quite likely, several of your neighbors and co-workers?

Sincerely,  
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23 May 2013

Mr. Denis Drew

Dear Mr. Drew:

Thanks for your e-mail explaining your "black hole theory of the minimum wage."

A critical part of your theory, as I understand it (with help from the link you sent to a video of Sen. Elizabeth Warren talking about wages and worker productivity\*), is that the minimum wage hasn't risen by as much as has overall worker productivity. Supply and demand, therefore, presumably aren't working for low-skilled workers.

Ms. Warren and you are correct that worker pay in the long run is determined by worker productivity. The productivity that's relevant, however, is MARGINAL productivity - namely, the value that 'the last' worker added to a class of production projects adds to the market value of the outputs of those projects. But not all workers and not all production projects are alike. The level of aggregation at which Ms. Warren and you conduct this conversation is meaningless for the point you wish to make. You confuse trends in overall worker productivity with that of the marginal productivity of low-skilled workers.

If, all other things unchanged, consumer demand for neurosurgeons rises relative to that for general practitioners, the wages of neurosurgeons will rise relative to that of GPs. The reason is that the marginal productivity of neurosurgeons will rise relative to that of GPs. The same result will occur if, all other things unchanged, the number of GPs increases relative to that of neurosurgeons. If the average productivity of physicians as a group rises over time, nothing in economic theory says that the productivity or the wages of all physicians must rise by equal amounts - by amounts equal to the rise in average physician productivity and average physician wages. And nothing says that the wages of some kinds of physicians cannot fall even when average physician productivity is rising.

What's true for physicians is true for workers generally. There's absolutely no reason for Ms. Warren and you to conclude that the standard economic theory of wage determination is faulty, or fails to apply to low-skilled workers, simply because the wages of one kind of workers - the low-skilled - have not risen by as much as these wages would have risen had they been determined by the rise in average worker productivity. What matters is marginal productivity of the particular kinds of workers in question.

Sincerely,  
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25 May 2013

Mr. Ben H\_\_\_\_\_:

Dear Ben:

I'm glad that you'd support open immigration in the absence of a welfare state. I challenge, though, your reason for rejecting my second-best proposal to open up immigration to foreigners who would agree, as a condition of immigrating to America, to take no cash handouts from federal, state, and local governments and to bind their children to the same restrictions.

You allege that it would be "immoral" to have policies that treat some people (native-born Americans eligible for government handouts) differently than other people (immigrants who are ineligible for such handouts), and you worry that such immigrants would be regarded to their detriment as "inferior second caste citizens."

First, it's not clear that, in this still-bourgeois society of ours, people who pull their own weight and never get government welfare will be regarded as "inferior" to welfare recipients. I can imagine the opposite impression taking hold.

Second, I put to you the question that the economist Lant Pritchett puts to those who share your concern about government-welfare restrictions for immigrants. Here's Pritchett writing in 2006:

"A common response to the idea that not all people allowed to enter a country to work would necessarily be entitled to all privileges of citizens is: 'Who wants to live in the kind of country where people are not treated equally?'... The rejoinder to the 'kind of country' objection is: 'Who wants to live in the kind of country that uses coercion to perpetuate global inequality?'"\*

Moral considerations, by their nature, do not stop at political borders.

Sincerely,  
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\* Lant Pritchett, *Let Their People Come* (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2006), pp. 84-85.

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28 May 2013

Program Director, WTOP Radio  
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

You report that the U.S. is the "only advanced economy without guaranteed vacation." The tone of your report, however, mistakenly suggests that this fact harms American workers.

When government mandates vacation time it artificially restricts employers' ability to compete for employees by offering, in lieu of the number of vacation days mandated by government, other forms of compensation such as higher take-home pay, greater employer contributions to pensions, or more flexible daily work schedules. Therefore, such a mandate reduces workers' bargaining power over the terms of their employment contracts. Each and every worker -regardless of his or her personal circumstances or preferences - has no option but to accept the vacation terms as dictated by government.

So rather than report in somber tones that the U.S. is the "only advanced economy without guaranteed vacation," you'd serve the cause of accuracy better by reporting in upbeat tones that the U.S. is the "only advanced economy still to guarantee to its workers the freedom to determine how much vacation time each would like in place of other forms of compensation."

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