



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux

Chairman, Department of Economics

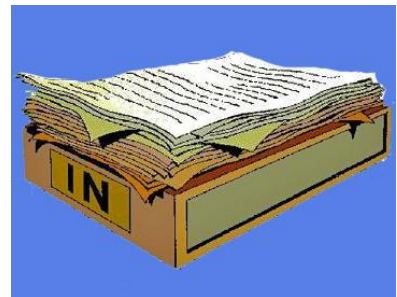
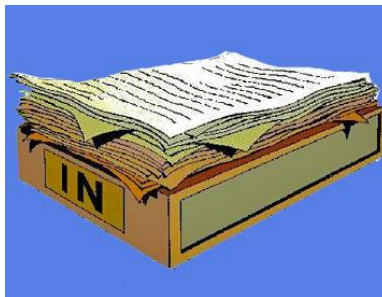
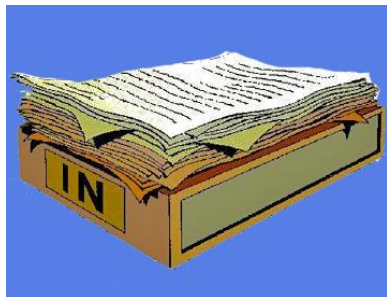
Martha and Nelson Getchell Chair for Free Market Capitalism

Mercatus Center

George Mason University

dboudrea@gmu.edu

<http://www.cafehayek.com>



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.

12 June 2013

Programming Director, WTOP Radio
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

Perhaps NSA Director Gen. Keith Alexander is correct that, as you report, "that once-secret surveillance programs disrupted dozens of terrorist attacks" ("Programs disrupted dozens of attacks," June 12).

Of course, we can never know. That's the nature of secret government programs. We are assured - of course! - by high officials that their secretive uses of snooping powers will yield benefits and not be abused. "Trust us," they insist.

But no sensible and self-respecting people fall for such assurances even when there is yet no evidence that such snooping has produced material harm. As Edmund Burke said in Parliament in 1775 about America: "In other countries, the people, more simple, and of a less mercurial cast, judge of an ill principle in government only by an actual grievance; here they anticipate the evil, and judge of the pressure of the grievance by the badness of the principle. They augur misgovernment at a distance; and sniff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze."*

The principle of the NSA's program is bad indeed, and its smell is rancid.

Sincerely,
Donald J. Boudreaux
Professor of Economics
and
Martha and Nelson Getchell Chair for the Study of Free Market Capitalism at the
Mercatus Center
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA 22030

* http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=advanced_search.php

13 June 2013

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)
Capitol Hill
Washington, DC

Dear Sen. Warren:

In your letter today to Michael Froman - Pres. Obama's nominee for U.S. Trade Representative - you criticize the administration for being opaque about the details of the negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

It's unclear from your letter if your concern is that the administration will do too little or too much to lower taxes and other obstacles on Americans who buy goods and services from foreign producers. I certainly hope, though, that your demand for greater transparency is sparked by a wish to make trade freer, regardless of the existence or height of any tariffs and subsidies that other governments wreak on their economies.

Yet judging from your many pronouncements on economic matters, I fear that you're more likely to support "managed" or "fair" or "strategic" trade rather than genuine free trade. If my fear is justified, I urge you to read the very letter that you sent to Mr. Froman and reflect on your explicit recognition there of the "benefit" of "an open marketplace of ideas."

If, as you rightly insist, the marketplace of ideas is best left open and unrestrained, then, I suggest, so, too, is the marketplace of goods and services best left open and unrestrained. A government that cannot be trusted to suppress the flow and competition of ideas does not become trustworthy and wise when it turns its attentions to suppressing the flow and competition of goods and services. And because censorship and political suppression abroad in no way justify censorship and political suppression here at home, tariffs and other forms of economic suppression abroad in no way justify tariffs and other forms of economic suppression here at home.

If you truly understand and celebrate the benefits of an open marketplace of ideas, then you will also understand and celebrate the benefits of an open marketplace of goods and services. And you will, as a result, champion a policy of unilateral free trade.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Boudreaux
Professor of Economics

and

Martha and Nelson Getchell Chair for the Study of Free Market Capitalism at the
Mercatus Center

George Mason University

Fairfax, VA 22030

18 June 2013

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

Dear Editor:

Michael Gerson argues that the G.O.P., to remain relevant, must "become more socially inclusive without becoming socially liberal" ("The GOP's leadership reform challenge," June 18). The details of his formula are sketchy, but we can infer from his many attacks on libertarianism that Mr. Gerson is warning Republicans against supporting same-sex marriage, drug legalization, and other pro-freedom policy reforms that are conventionally (if not always accurately) thought to be favored by the political left.

Yet in today's New York Post, Michael Barone cites data that show "Americans becoming more libertarian on cultural issues" ("More freedom & fewer guardrails"). If true, Republicans should reject Mr. Gerson's advice to continue to be the party of perverse limited-menu freedom - a party that properly waxes eloquently about the freedom to earn profits through consensual capitalist acts but, strangely, balks at the freedom to express love through consensual homosexual acts; a party that appropriately defends the right to peacefully carry guns but, oddly, opposes the right to peacefully get high on marijuana and other illegal drugs; a party reasonably and deeply suspicious of politicians' motives and abilities to tax, spend, and regulate sensibly in matters economic but - most bizarrely of all - unreasonably confident about those same politicians' presumed selflessness and skills at conducting shooting wars abroad and wars on terror at home.

Sincerely,
Donald J. Boudreaux
Professor of Economics
and
Martha and Nelson Getchell Chair for the Study of Free Market Capitalism at the
Mercatus Center
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA 22030

24 June 2013

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

Dear Editor:

Wisely skeptical of stimulus policies, Robert Samuelson writes "Economists have been taught in graduate school that advances in their discipline make it possible to stabilize and, within broad boundaries, control economic activity" ("Cheap money can't buy a strong economy," June 24).

That's true for most economics students, but not for those studying at George Mason University. Our Economics program honors a very different tradition, one rooted in the wisdom of Adam Smith and brought to prominence in the 20th century by the Nobel laureate F.A. Hayek. Furthered by GMU's own Nobel economists, Vernon Smith (now at Chapman University) and the late James Buchanan, this tradition - dubbed "Masonomics" by the economist Arnold Kling - counsels deep skepticism of those who claim to possess the intellectual and moral capacity to be trusted to "control economic activity."

Additionally, our scholarship informs us Masonomists that market economies are vastly more complex and, when free, more creative and resilient than is revealed in typical textbooks and by even the most awe-inspiring mathematical models.

The result is that our program inoculates students against - rather than injects them with - the hubris that fills too many other economists today with the delusion that they are capable of consciously 'controlling' or 'guiding' economic activity for the public good.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Boudreaux

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Martha and Nelson Getchell Chair for the Study of Free Market Capitalism at the
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George Mason University

Fairfax, VA 22030

