



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux

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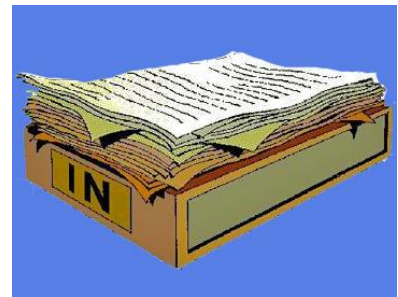
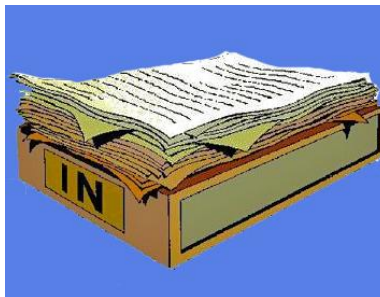
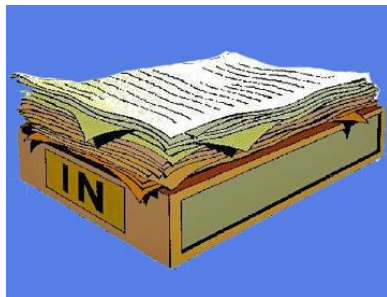
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Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed, but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet,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

14 March 2013

Editor, Baltimore Sun

Dear Editor:

Jonah Goldberg rightly defends Sen. Rand Paul against conservatives who react with hostility to anyone who questions the presidential use of military authority ("What Rand Paul got right," March 14). But I remain mystified that Mr. Goldberg and many other sensible conservatives nevertheless, to quote Mr. Goldberg, "agree with much of the substance of Mr. Paul's critics."

In what universe is a human being, one called "president of the United States," who cannot be trusted to spend other people's money wisely - who is held to be rash and irresponsible when pushing legislation to extend health-insurance coverage - who is regarded as arrogant and ignorant for his support of greater government regulation of financial markets - who is accused of being a dangerous social engineer when he launches schemes to redistribute wealth - who is exposed as a typical, high-on-hubris, popularity-grabbing politician who never lets his incomprehension of matters soothe his itch to tax, spend, and issue diktats all in ways that conservatives correctly understand to be destructive - in what universe is such a person to be trusted and saluted as Our Protector and as a paragon of prudence whenever he turns his attention to deploying military force?

Like conservatives, I look with deep suspicion upon any politician who exercises authority to spend other people's money, to regulate wages, or to plan a 'green' economy. Unlike too many conservatives, however, I look with even deeper suspicion upon any politician who exercises authority to kill.

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

15 March 2013

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

Dear Editor:

Bill Brockman is dismayed that “the defense of the country” is based “on budgetary factors rather than geopolitical ones” (Letters, March 15).

One should not be dismayed at inescapable reality.

First, regardless of the merits of an ever-more-mighty military, resources used to provide it are scarce. Not even the most sublime and superpower-ful government can successfully ignore costs in attempts to ensure that military provision is based exclusively on geopolitical considerations. To insist otherwise is the conservatives’ equivalent of “Progressives” insistence that government can successfully ignore costs in attempts to ensure that health-care provision is based exclusively on medical considerations.

Second, Mr. Brockman assumes without justification that all decisions to raise the Pentagon’s budget are free of politics and, therefore, are warranted. But if Mr. Brockman is correct that today’s cuts in the defense budget are driven by rash and irresponsible politics, he has no good reason to suppose that yesterday’s increases in the defense budget were driven by some different and more-enlightened force.

Sincerely,
Donald J. Boudreaux
Professor of Economics
and
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19 March 2013

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

Dear Editor:

You rightly criticize members of Congress who aim to keep energy prices in America artificially low by restricting U.S. exports of natural gas ("The benefits of a free-trade deal with Japan," March 16). As Benjamin Franklin wrote in July 1778 to James Lovell,

"To lay duties on a commodity exported, which our neighbors want, is a knavish attempt to get something for nothing. The statesman who first invented it had the genius of a pickpocket, and would have been a pickpocket if fortune had suitably placed him. The nations who have practiced it have suffered fourfold, as pickpockets ought to suffer."*

Sincerely,
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*See footnote six here:

<http://www.public.coe.edu/~theller/soj/ttl/franklin/b605.htm>

28 March 2013

Editor, The Financial Times

Dear Editor:

Ed Crook's reports on attempts by some members of Congress to restrict U.S. exports of natural gas ("Opposition mounts to US gas exports," March 26). These politicians assert that, by allegedly lowering Americans' energy costs, such restrictions will raise Americans' living standards.

They're wrong.

To artificially restrict exports is to artificially reduce export earnings and, thus, to decrease the volume of imports that can be purchased. Our standard of living would fall because we Americans would get fewer of the foreign-made goods and services that currently enhance our standard of living.

And our reduced access to low-priced imports will likely not be offset by any promised lower energy costs. Despite its name, the supply of natural gas is not natural. It's an artifact of the investments and entrepreneurial effort applied to its production. Natural-gas supplies in America today are as high as they are only because investors and entrepreneurs, anticipating being able to sell gas globally, have invested heavily in this industry. If Uncle Sam were now to restrict the market for natural gas, the investments and entrepreneurship devoted to producing gas will shrink - resulting over time in lower energy supplies and higher energy prices.

Adam Smith understood this reality. In *The Wealth of Nations* he warned that export restrictions cause the market for the restricted good to "generally be understocked, the people whose business it is to supply it being generally afraid lest their goods should be left upon their hands. The prohibition of exportation limits the improvement and

cultivation of the country to what the supply of its own inhabitants requires. The freedom of exportation enables it to extend cultivation for the supply of foreign nations."*

Sincerely,

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* Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*
(Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981 [1776]), p. 537.

(Specifically, this quotation is from Book IV, chapter 5.)

