



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux

Chairman, Department of Economics

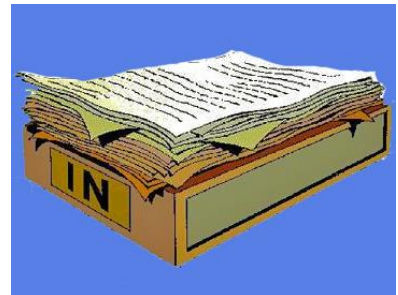
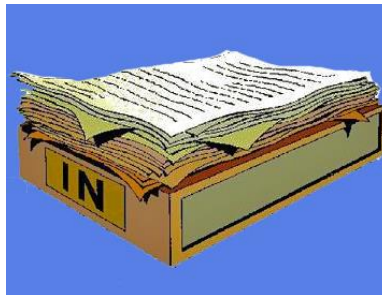
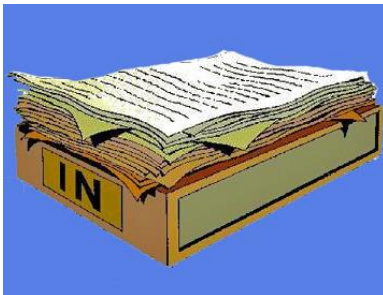
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Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed, but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet,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

10 November 2014

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

Dear Editor:

Your report "Left struggled to move voters with Koch attacks and other big-money messages" (Nov. 10) prompts a question: why are the people who clamor most loudly to get other people's money out of politics also the ones who clamor most loudly to get politics *into* other people's money?

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

17 November 2014

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

Dear Editor:

It's very good that you (with help from my colleagues Bryan Caplan and David Levy) draw readers' attention to the late University of Virginia economist and Defense Department official Warren Nutter ("Notable &

Quotable," Nov. 17). Nutter was a fountain of profound insight and wisdom before his early death in 1979; sadly, today he is largely forgotten.

My favorite example of Nutter's acumen - and of his wit - is his observation that "in the academic world, you think now and decide never; and in the government, it's just exactly the other way around."*

Sincerely,

Donald J. Boudreaux

Professor of Economics

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* Quoted on page 51 of William R. Allen, "Economics, Economists, and Economic Policy: Modern American Experiences," *History of Political Economy* (Spring 1977), Vol. 9, pp. 48-88.

18 November 2014

Program Director, WTOP Radio

Dear Sir or Madam:

During today's 10:00am hour you reported that Maryland governor Martin O'Malley objects to building the Keystone XL pipeline because (as you summarized his objection) "the pipeline will create too few jobs to offset its environmental cost."

I have no idea if this pipeline should or should not be built. But I do know that Mr. O'Malley's stated reason for opposing it makes no sense. Labor (like each of the other resources) used to build the pipeline is a cost, not a benefit. So whatever are the environmental costs of the pipeline, this project becomes *more* justified the *fewer* are the workers used to build and to operate it. Mr. O'Malley seemingly thinks that one cost (namely, the pipeline's environmental risk) becomes acceptable to bear, not if it is offset by lower costs on other fronts but, instead, only if another cost of the pipeline proves to be even *greater* than the environmental cost.

Mr. O'Malley's objection, in short, is that the pipeline is not costly enough!

It's distressing that people as economically illiterate as Mr. O'Malley have influence over public policy.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Boudreaux

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20 November 2014

Editor, *Washington Post*

1150 15th St., NW

Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

David Ignatius proposes that climate change be treated "as a moral issue - a matter like civil rights" ("The moral issue of climate change," Nov. 19).

This comparison fails. The core concern that sparked the civil-rights movement was simple: government-mandated racial segregation and discrimination wrongly prevented each African-American from pursuing his or her life's goals on equal footing with white Americans. Neither the existence nor the baleful effects of such barriers was ever in doubt. In addition, destroying these barriers was both a relatively straightforward procedure and, by any remotely acceptable ethical standards, unambiguously the right thing to do.

Climate change is completely different. Legitimate debate continues over the magnitude of impending temperature change and - despite the predictions of the novel that inspired Mr. Ignatius's call for a moral crusade against climate change - debate continues over the likely consequences of any such change. Legitimate debate also rages over the effects of government efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

Ending Jim Crow simply got government out of the way of peaceful human

interactions - interactions that build civilization. In contrast, empowering government to address climate change complicatedly puts government in the way of market interactions - interactions that have generated what Nobel economist Edmund Phelps calls "mass flourishing"* on a scale unprecedented in history. Given governments' dubious record of intervening into economies - and given free markets' impressive record of raising the living standards of ordinary people and of adapting to change - to fuel government efforts on the climate front with moral fervor would be a grave and dangerous error.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Boudreaux

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* Edmund S. Phelps, *Mass Flourishing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

