



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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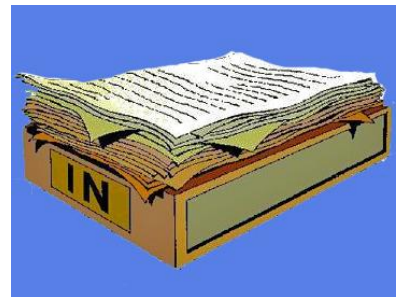
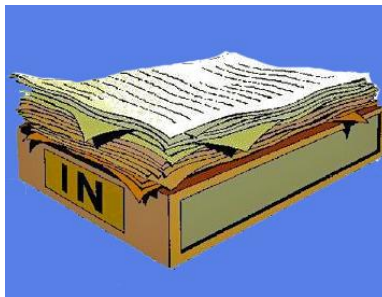
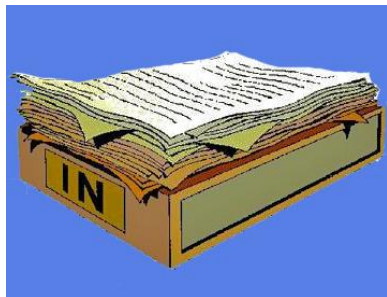
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Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed, but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet,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

7 February 2014

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

Dear Editor:

Consider two items in today's news. The first is the Journal's own report that "politics often complicates the task of wringing savings from the U.S. military budget. Lawmakers, facing pressures from defense contractors and local communities, often oppose proposed cuts to military bases, aircraft and shipbuilding programs and weapons systems" ("Pentagon Drops Plan to Mothball USS George Washington Aircraft Carrier"). In short, politics corrupts military operations.

The second item is a Washington Post op-ed whose author, Henri Barkey, rightly criticizes Pres. Obama for nominating as U.S. ambassador to Norway a man who knows nothing of diplomacy or of Norway. The wannabe ambassador's only 'qualification' is that he bundled lots of political contributions to help Mr. Obama win reelection. In short, politics corrupts diplomatic operations.

So I've some questions for my conservative friends: Why do instances such as these not cause you to be as leery of government bureaucracies called "the Pentagon" and "State Department" as you are of government bureaucracies called "Federal Trade Commission" and "Environmental Protection Agency"? If ignorance and special interest politics routinely drive Uncle Sam's domestic economic interventions, why do you think that such ignorance and special-interest politics only rarely drive Uncle Sam's foreign interventions? Why do you trust venal and arrogant politicians - who so regularly screw up the domestic economy by unleashing, over here, Niagaras of taxpayer funds along with hordes of U.S. bureaucrats and tax collectors - to bring civility and prosperity to foreigners by unleashing, over there, Niagaras of taxpayer funds along with hordes of U.S. diplomats and soldiers?

Sincerely,
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and

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10 February 2014

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

Dear Editor:

E.J. Dionne writes that "[F.A.] Hayek and [Ludwig von] Mises perceived little difference between democratic governments that used their power to plan against recessions and dictatorships that did the same thing. In this view, the policies of Franklin Roosevelt led down what Hayek called the 'Road to Serfdom' and were thus objectively comparable to those of Hitler or Stalin" ("An economic school has led to gridlock in Washington," Feb. 10).

Not so. Instead, Hayek argued (in his 1944 book, *The Road to Serfdom*) that individual freedom will inevitably be snuffed out **IF** government insists on centrally planning the economy in the way demanded by many socialists of the era, or **IF** government attempts to protect every producer and worker from the forces of market competition. The argument is neither that the slightest overreach by government dooms society to totalitarianism, nor that all unwise interventions such as those of the New Deal are "objectively comparable" to the tyrannies unleashed by Hitler or Stalin.

Hayek and Mises were certainly not New Dealers. But for Mr. Dionne to caricature their warning that freedom cannot survive **IF** the economy becomes overwhelmingly politicized as a claim that the slightest bit of politicization is "objectively comparable" to Nazism and Soviet communism is absurd. Mr. Dionne's caricature of these scholars' works is evidence that he writes about what he does not know.

Sincerely,
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13 February 2014

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

Dear Editor:

You report that Jason Furman, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, recently "displayed a chart showing how food stamps and other social programs had lowered poverty dramatically over the past half century.... But the graph also showed that the economy itself had done nothing for the poor: Only government dollars had" ("Economist Jason Furman is the wonkiest wonk in the White House," Feb. 13).

Whatever the consequences of government welfare programs, Mr. Furman is mistaken to assert that, over the past half century, "the economy itself had done nothing for the poor."

Here's a link to a 2008 article with its own charts.* Figure 2 shows that the percentage of *poor* American households in 2005 to have refrigerators, stoves, color televisions, air conditioning, and automatic dishwashers is higher than was the percentage of *all* American households in 1971 to have these amenities. And my own research suggests an important reason for this happy fact: the amount of time that ordinary ("non-supervisory") workers must work in order to earn enough income to buy these (and many other) products is today much lower than it was decades ago.

For example, to buy a 22 cubic feet refrigerator-freezer, such a worker in 1975 had to toil for 140 hours. To buy the same size refrigerator-freezer today, the typical American worker must work only 52 hours. To buy a 30" electric range and oven cost the typical American worker in 1975 125 hours of work; today such a range and oven costs the typical American worker only 21 hours of work.

Similar reductions in work-time costs have occurred for food, clothing, and countless other goods and services - a trend that is strong evidence that "the economy itself" continues to improve the living standards of middle-income and poor Americans.

Sincerely,
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* W. Michael Cox and Richard Alm, "How Are We Doing?" *The American*, July/August 2008:

<http://www.american.com/archive/2008/july-august-magazine-contents/how-are-we-doing/>

14 February 2014

Editor, *Seattle Times*

Dear Editor:

Mike O'Brien and Rich Stolz - upset that new suppliers of taxi services are operating in Seattle without government's blessing - assert that "multimillion-dollar corporations unleashed their services without seeking permission" ("Looking out for immigrant drivers in new taxi, Uber, Lyft laws," Feb. 13).

Messrs. O'Brien and Stolz are mistaken. While these new taxi suppliers might not have sought permission from government, they most certainly did seek permission from the people who matter: consumers.

And not only did suppliers of these new taxi services seek such permission from the people, their success proves that they also *got* that permission - permission that, because it is given by people who actually use the services *and pay for them with their own money*, is far more real and relevant than is any 'permission' bestowed by politicians and bureaucrats.

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