



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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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 may require registration or subscription to access if they are. Some of the original articles are syndicated and therefore may have appeared in other publications also.

27 August 2006

The Editor, The Economist
25 St James's Street
London SW1A 1HG
United Kingdom

SIR:

I'm surprised that you, among all publications, declare that a "silver lining" around hurricane Katrina is that it has created jobs ("New Orleans: One year on," August 26). Were all, or even most, of the workers now rebuilding New Orleans idle before the storm hit? Unlikely.

Describing the jobs made necessary by its massive destruction as a "silver lining" around a hurricane is like describing the jobs created by high tariffs as a

"silver lining" around protectionism.

27 August 2006

The Editor, New York Times
229 West 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036

You assert that "the quality of the teacher corps is more crucial to school reform than anything else" ("Exploding the Charter School Myth," August 27). This claim makes no more sense than would a claim that, say, the quality of the engineering corps is more crucial than anything else to improving the economic performance of North Korea.

Just as economies perform better as they become less politicized and more competitive - as each consumer enjoys more

direct and meaningful choices over which suppliers to patronize and which to abandon - schools will perform better only if teachers and administrators confront real incentives to perform well as judged by parents. Such incentives are impossible when schools are run by bureaucrats, overseen by politicians, are fully financed by taxpayers, face little competition, and have captive customers who pay nothing directly for the "services" they are forced to consume.

26 August 2006

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

Dear Editor:

My confidence in your business reporting is not enhanced when I read in today's edition that protectionists blame "an overvalued Chinese currency for the loss of American jobs" ("Fed Chief Backs Global-Wealth Sharing," August 26). In fact, protectionists assert that the Chinese currency is undervalued - a situation that subsidizes Americans' purchase of Chinese goods while it taxes Chinese

purchases of American output.

Of course, whether or not the yuan really is undervalued is a separate issue.

25 August 2006

Editor, The New Yorker

To the Editor:

In "The Risk Pool" (August 28), Malcolm Gladwell repeats the new mantra of those who advocate nationalized health insurance: having to pay for workers' health insurance puts American firms at an international competitive disadvantage.

A fundamental flaw with the conclusion that government-supplied universal health insurance will make American firms more competitive is the fact that all that government supplies is paid for with resources taken from taxpayers. Therefore, much of the cost of such health insurance will still burden American business - directly in the form of higher tax bills and indirectly as higher taxes reduce the profitability of private investment and dampen economic growth. And because of the huge free-rider problems that

fully nationalized health-care coverage will create, along with the red tape that will grow like kudzu from the Sisyphean attempts to solve these problems, the full burden on the economy of government-supplied universal health insurance will be colossal.

24 August 2006

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

Dear Editor:

Russ Wise wants insurance rates in Louisiana to be set by Uncle Sam (Letters, August 24)

Mr. Wise's complaint is not that current rates don't reflect the cost of supplying insurance. Instead, when he writes that "a federal agency could set rates on a more fair and equitable basis, spreading risk among tens of millions of people instead of just a few thousand," he's complaining that residents in places such as Wyoming and Vermont are not forced to subsidize insurance coverage for residents of the hurricane- and flood-prone Gulf Coast.

Contrary to his assertion, however, there's nothing fair or equitable about such forced subsidization. In fact, it would be grossly unfair and inequitable - as well as economically foolish - to force people living in places less prone to flood and wind damage to subsidize people who choose to live on the Gulf Coast.

23 August 2006

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

Dear Editor:

To reduce interest-groups' political influence, Michael Scheinberg proposes "A complete ban on lobbying by lawmakers and government officials for five years after they leave government service and a prohibition against political contributions by industry groups" (Letters, August 23).

Such a ban can't work. Lobbying is as much a consequence as a cause of a behemoth state that takes from the politically unorganized and gives to the politically organized. To imagine that politicians who possess such power – and the shamelessness

requisite to exercising it – will become stewards of the public interest merely by imposing formal restrictions on lobbying is a childish fantasy.

22 August 2006

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

Dear Editor:

E. J. Dionne explores reasons for liberalism's poor public image ("A Wrong Turn Led to the 'L-Word,'" August 22). One reason he overlooks is that American liberalism today, as a political philosophy, is illiberal. Focusing on outcomes (such as income "distribution"), it often ignores complex processes. Obsessed with rescuing underdogs, it finds underdogs even where none exist – and then sanctimoniously rescues people who need no rescuing.

Maurice Cranston wrote that "By definition, a liberal is a man who believes in liberty." [Maurice Cranston, Liberalism, The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (1967)] Today's "liberals" carelessly discard liberty whenever it interferes with

their favorite social-engineering schemes.

21 August 2006

Editor, New Orleans
Times-Picayune

To the Editor:

William Borah unwisely
calls for New Orleans to be
rebuilt according to "a
master plan with the force
of law, a plan that the
politicians as well as the

citizens would be legally
required to follow" (Letters,
August 21).

Mr. Borah and all New
Orleanians should heed
the wisdom of the late Jane
Jacobs, one of history's
greatest students of cities.
Ms. Jacobs described a
city's "intricate order" as "a
manifestation of the
freedom of countless

numbers of people to make
and carry out countless
plans" (Jane Jacobs, *The
Life and Death of Great
American Cities* (1961), p.
391) - and she warned that
master plans of the sort
that Mr. Borah admires will
only suffocate this vital
source of any city's life.