



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.

22 October 2006

Editor, The Washington Times

Dear Editor:

Reading Sarah Longwell's warning of the arrogance of those who would have government force the rest of us to change our diets ("Nervous-Nelly Nation," Oct. 22), I was struck by the name of the group that is suing California restaurants for serving grilled chicken: Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

The American Heritage Dictionary (4th edition, 2000) defines 'responsible' as "Involving personal accountability or ability to

act without guidance or superior authority." So this litigious group of MDs is misnamed. It OPPOSES responsibility by seeking to impede personal accountability and to oblige people to act according to the commands of a superior authority.

21 October 2006

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

Dear Editor:

Alys Cohen wants to ban "'no doc' loans where a borrower simply pays a higher interest rate in exchange for not documenting income.

These loans are often used to push unaffordable mortgages on borrowers who have fixed incomes" (Letters, Oct. 21). She calls such loans "predatory."

A different interpretation is that these loans are an innovative way - driven by competition among lenders - to enable persons who otherwise would not qualify for a mortgage to do so. Banning such loans would indeed result in fewer low-income persons suffering foreclosures on their mortgages, but it would also result in fewer low-income persons owning homes.

20 October 2006

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

To the Editor:

Andrew Grossman writes that "It has been widely reported that workers abroad in Wal-Mart's suppliers' factories routinely experience forced labor" (Letters, October 20). Like space-aliens in Roswell, NM, this claim might well be widely reported but it is also wildly implausible.

The only marketable goods that slave labor can reliably produce are ones whose production requires mostly low-skill, easy-to-monitor manual tasks and whose quality cannot readily be degraded by uninspired workers. Examples of such products are sugar cane and cotton. Manufactured goods, in contrast, are too costly to produce with slaves. The quality of slave-produced manufactured outputs will be too low. Moreover, factory owners have no desire to entrust slaves with the operation of expensive, complex, and easily sabotaged factory machinery.

19 October 2006

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

To the Editor:

Proposing to tax convenient means of ordering fast-food, Martin Schmidt inappropriately anthropomorphizes the country by writing that "we face a crisis of obesity and its concomitant health problems" ("Supertax Me," October 19).

Regardless of how many Americans are grossly overweight, obesity is an individual condition rather than a collective condition. As such, solutions to obesity should be individual rather than collective. If my neighbor is obese, it's none of my business to force him to lose weight - or, more generally, arrogantly to presume that I know better than he does what's best for him.

18 October 2006

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

To the Editor:

Public understanding of trade is sufficiently poor

without you deepening the problem ("Not Coming Soon to a Lot Near You: Chinese Cars," Oct. 18). Contrary to your words, imports are not an "invasion," and foreign merchants who sell things to us neither "conquer" industries nor "flood markets." Invasion and conquest are done by armies using violence to force foreign populations to do the bidding of the conquerors. Floods are similarly unwelcome as they destroy people's lives and properties.

Trade is the opposite. It's peaceful: no one is forced to buy imports. It's productive: consumers get more goods and services at lower prices. Ask New Orleanians today if they regard a Circuit City stocked with Chinese electronic goods to be a calamity on par with Katrina's floodwaters.

16 October 2006

Editor, Scientific American

To the Editor:

Jeffrey Sachs writes that the late "Friedrich Von Hayek was Wrong" ("Welfare States, beyond Ideology," November 2006). This Nobel laureate's error allegedly

was to argue that the welfare state paves - as the title of Hayek's 1944 book expressed it - "the road to serfdom."

Sachs misreads Hayek. Although he was no fan of the welfare state, Hayek never argued that it leads to tyranny. In *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek distinguished between government efforts to ensure "limited security" and government efforts to achieve "absolute security." Hayek warned

only against efforts to achieve the latter, which he described as "the security of a given standard of life, or of the relative position which one person or group enjoys compared with others." Hayek was correct that such "security" is achievable only by tyranny.

But as for limited security, Hayek wrote that "There is no reason why in a society which has reached the general level of wealth which ours has attained the first kind of security [that is,

limited security] should not be guaranteed to all without endangering general freedom.... Nor is there any reason why the state should not assist the individuals in providing for those common hazards of life against which, because of their uncertainty, few individuals can make adequate provision." [F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (University of Chicago Press, 1944), pp. 133-134]