



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.

29 October 2006

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

Dear Editor:

Dick Armey speculates about why the GOP broke its promise to rein in government ("Where We Went Wrong," October 29).

My colleagues, the Nobel economist James Buchanan and his collaborator Gordon Tullock, aren't surprised by the GOP's sorry performance. They explain that, because the benefits of most government programs (say, tariffs on sugar) are concentrated on

a relatively small handful of persons (sugar farmers) while the costs are spread over hundreds of millions of persons (sugar consumers), elected officials are soaked in incentives to gratify concentrated interests and to ignore the general interest. And this flaw is only one of many that afflict politics.

Expecting politicians to elevate the public interest over their own individual interests and those of the special interests that inevitably haunt government lobbies is as realistic as expecting lions to sing lullabies to zebras.

28 October 2006

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

Dear Editor:

Senegal's president, Abdoulaye Wade, mistakenly blames much of sub-Saharan Africa's woes on high oil prices ("Africa Over a Barrel," Oct. 28). He then asks oil companies "to chip in from recent windfall profits to reduce the increase in oil prices that has taken place since 2003."

The real problem in these countries isn't oil prices that are too high; it's economic freedom that is too low. In the latest Cato Institute Economic

Freedom of the World index, Mr. Wade's own country is ranked 90th. (For comparison, Hong Kong is ranked first, the United States third, and Zimbabwe last at 130.) Property rights in Senegal are insecure, and Senegalese citizens enjoy little freedom to trade while forced to endure especially burdensome regulations and unsound money. The same sad story holds throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa.

Africans don't need oil-company subsidies and more foreign aid. They need economic freedom.

27 October 2006

Editor, The New York Review of Books

To the Editor:

I've read few passages in your pages that are as mistaken as Bill McKibben's assertion that "The technology we need most badly is the technology of community - the knowledge about how to cooperate to get things done.... We Americans haven't needed our neighbors for anything important" ("How Close to Catastrophe?" Nov. 16).

Each of us cooperates daily with countless others - neighbors, fellow citizens, foreigners - to ensure our prosperity. My mind boggles at the number of people who cooperated to make available to me, for example, the shirt on my back. Cotton-growers in Egypt; fashion designers in Italy; textile workers in Malaysia; merchant marines from around the globe; investment bankers in Manhattan; insurers in Hartford; truck drivers along the east coast; department-store executives in Seattle; security guards and retail clerks in Virginia - these people and millions of others cooperated so that I might wear an ordinary shirt. Ditto for my car, my house, my subscription to The New York Review of Books.

For McKibben to say that "cheap fossil fuel has allowed us all to become extremely individualized, even hyperindividualized" is to be blind to the amazing and vast system of cooperation that today spans the globe. Clearly, we have, in spades, "knowledge about how to cooperate to get things done."

26 October 2006

Editor, USA Today

To the Editor:

You report that "consumer advocates and student groups worry that the growth" of private student loans "could prove disastrous for borrowers who don't understand the risks" ("Private student loans pose greater risk," Oct. 26).

Well, yes. Any contractual agreement can prove disastrous for a contracting party who doesn't understand it. But presumably people smart enough to attend college are smart enough to grasp the terms and implications of a loan agreement. Those few persons who aren't capable of such understanding should not apply for these loans - much less for admission to college.

25 October 2006

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

Dear Editor:

To show their commitment to the war on drugs, school children now dress like combat soldiers ("Clad in Camouflage for a Cause,"

October 25). How obscene.

The only legitimate use of military force is to protect citizens from violent aggressors - not to interfere with peaceful persons' choice of intoxicants. Celebrating militarized combat against personal liberty is both ugly and dangerous.

24 October 2006

Editor, Marketplace
Morning Report

Dear Editor:

Of all the arguments for Social Security, Jim Carrier's is the worst ("Let's up the Social Security tax," October 24). He asks "if Social Security hadn't existed ... would I have set aside hundreds of thousands to provide for myself?" And he answers: "Not likely. I proved that 10 years ago when I cashed an annuity and bought a sailboat. I sailed to Spain and had lots of fun. But as an investment it was worse than Enron."

No doubt.

But it's galling that Mr. Carrier presumes the rest of us to be as irresponsible as he is - and that we welcome public-policy advice offered by someone so financially reckless.