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.

5 February 2006
The Editor, New York Times
229 West 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036
To the Editor:

Milton Chaikin proposes that "we somehow find a way to reward those who improve their lifestyle and thus their health" (Letters, Feb. 5). Isn't better health itself the reward?

Of course, some people feel insufficiently rewarded by their own good health. That's their business. The rest of us should not be forced to subsidize healthier lifestyles for persons who care so little about their own well-being that they'll pursue it only if others pick up the tab.

4 February 2006
The Editor, The Boston Globe
To the Editor:

Frank Powers writes that ABC newsmen Bob Woodruff and Doug Vogt were "in Iraq not in service to their country but rather to serve their media employers and the public who follow those media" (Letters, Feb. 4). This attitude is disturbing, for it equates "service to country" with service to government.

Contrary to Mr. Powers's insinuation, anyone whose services are voluntarily paid for - from manicurists at the mall to researchers at 3M to telegenic network news anchors - serve their country at least as much as do those whose paychecks are drawn on the U.S. Treasury.

3 February 2006
The Editor, The Boston Globe
To the Editor:

All this chatter of "oil addiction" ("Going cold turkey on oil," Feb. 3) signals an addiction to lazy, banal thinking.

Despite conventional wisdom, oil is abundant. This abundance keeps its price low. This low price, in turn, makes it sensible for people to use lots of oil.

Americans are no more addicted to oil for fueling our cars than we are addicted to wood for building our homes or to pocket calculators for helping us balance our checkbooks.

2 February 2006
The Editor, The Christian Science Monitor
To the Editor:

Dan Everett says that "American workers' real wages have remained stagnant since the 1970s" (Letters, Feb. 2). This claim rests on a lazy interpretation of data.

First, the consumer price index - used to adjust wages for inflation - overstates inflation by inadequately accounting for higher product quality. (For example, today a new Chevy Malibu costs more than one did in 1975. But with airbags, CD player, higher fuel efficiency, and other features unavailable 30 years ago, today's new car is far better.) Second, the increased entry into the workforce
of large numbers of women and immigrants, who on average have lower skills than did the typical worker of the 1970s, creates more jobs paying wages below the mean. Thus, the measured AVERAGE real wage is held down - even if real wages earned by the great majority of workers are rising.

1 February 2006

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

Dear Editor:

Criticizing the banality of George Bush's State of the Union address, Steven Pearlstein asserts that Americans "are hungry - desperately so - for some straight talk from a political leader of either party about the economic challenges before them" ("Bush Echos Presidents Past in Empty Talk of Economics," Feb. 1).

How banal. If people hungered for straight talk, politicians - ever eager for votes - would satisfy it. The fact that the successful politician's messages range all the way from bromides to platitudes suggests that what people really demand from elected officials is romance rather than realism.

30 January 2006

The Editor, The Christian Science Monitor

To the Editor:

Contrary to the suggestion in David Francis's "High wages, low wages, and morality" (Jan. 30), it's doubtful that Adam Smith would endorse minimum wages and other interventions by government to make incomes more equal. The reason is that a key component of Smith's case for free markets was his clear-eyed realism about the dangers of government power.

As Smith wrote, "The statesman who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it."

31 January 2006

The Editor, The Boston Globe

To the Editor:

You assert, as if it were an incontrovertible truth, that recent tax cuts are a colossal policy mistake ("Bernanke's Opportunity," Jan. 31). While I agree that Washington is fiscally reckless, a budget has both revenues and expenses. Why do you assume that Uncle Sam collects too little tax revenue? Why not acknowledge that Uncle Sam spends irresponsibly?

When your brother-in-law is chin-deep in credit-card debt, do you criticize him for earning too-little income - or for spending beyond his means?