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.

26 May 2007
Editor, Baltimore Sun
Dear Editor:

Two of your readers - both opposed to immigration and at least one opposed also to imports - are unaware of a central fact of international commerce (Letters, May 26). When people in America buy imports or send money to family members abroad, they are not "removing that money from our economy." Dollars are valuable to foreigners only because those dollars can be spent or invested in America. If dollars, upon leaving the U.S., became irredeemable here, no foreign producer would sell products to Americans and no immigrants to America would bother sending dollars to their home countries.

Foreigners want dollars for the same reason that Americans want dollars: to buy American-made products and to invest in the American economy.

24 May 2007
The Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

To the Editor:

Kings of yore occasionally killed messengers bringing bad news. By voting to outlaw so-called "price gouging," the House of Representatives proves that its members are just as irrational as these ancient monarchs ("Tipping-Point Shock," May 24).

Higher prices merely report an underlying reality such as constrained refining capacity, higher demand, higher taxes, and more regulations. Statutes that prevent prices from rising do nothing to improve the underlying reality. Indeed, by silencing information about reality, restraints on price hikes keep consumers and producers acting in ignorance - thus making matters worse.

23 May 2007
Mr. Tom Davis, U.S. Rep.
U.S. House of
Representatives
2348 Rayburn House
Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-
4611

Dear Rep. Davis:

I am employed by George
Mason University. My
fellow faculty members and
I today were reminded by a
University administrator of
the requirements of the
"Fly America Act." I
confess that I'd never
before heard of this statute.
As explained by the GMU
administrator, this Act
"requires Federal
employees and their
dependents, consultants,
contractors, grantees, and
others performing United
States Government
financed foreign air travel
to travel by U.S. flag air
carriers." Because college
professors often receive
research grants from Uncle
Sam, it's good that
administrators at my school
warned us not to commit a
federal offense unwittingly
by using, say, NSF grant
funds to pay for air travel
on the likes of Lufthansa or
Taca.

I applaud your brilliant
scheme! Even if it costs
taxpayers more money,
otherwise this Act helps to
protect American carriers
from the nefarious
competition of foreign
airlines.

But why stop there? I
propose a "Study America
Act." The Congressional
wisdom and spirit behind
the Fly America Act, I
submit, requires also that
"Federal employees and
their dependents,
consultants, contractors,
grantees, and others
performing United States
Government financed
research to buy books,
journals, articles,
magazines, data sets, and
all other scholarly materials
produced only by U.S.
scholars" (such as myself).

Why must hard-working,
high-wage American
researchers compete
against foreign researchers
- a competition that
undoubtedly jeopardizes
our nation's defense?
Why, for example, should
researchers at the Centers
for Disease Control use
American tax dollars to pay
for subscriptions to the
British medical journal The
Lancet? Doing so shrinks
the market for American
medical research and
thereby hurts America's
health-care industry and,
ultimately, America's
children. Or why should
federally funded social-
science researchers use
tax dollars to buy books on
international trade written
by foreigners when my own
book on globalization will
soon be out? My book, I
assure you, is as good a
product as any rival tome
penned by a foreign
scholar.

I look forward to your
consideration and
response.
I'm no fan of Jimmy Carter, but conservatives now lathered-up by the former President's criticisms of the current President need a reality check (Letters, May 23).

These conservatives forget that Carter's presidency launched the deregulation of airlines, trucking, and railroads, and that Mr. Carter appointed inflation hawk Paul Volcker as Fed Chairman.

They forget also that Bush II created an obnoxious prescription-drug entitlement program; that he expanded federal control over education; that he shamelessly raises tariffs for blatant political gain; and that he increased discretionary spending faster than did LBJ. And while many conservatives applaud the war in Iraq, not all do. George Will, for example, correctly recognizes that civil society abroad can no more be built by U.S. armed forces than civil society at home can be built by U.S. bureaucrats.

Matthew Slaughter compellingly explains why Americans are not hurt by the value of the Chinese yuan ("Yuan Worries," May 22). But will Senators Schumer, Graham, and other protectionists in Washington be persuaded by Mr. Slaughter's logic and evidence to stop imagining that the yuan's value justifies their harmful efforts to hamper trade between Americans and the Chinese? Alas, no.

As Will Durant lamented near the end of his massive survey of human history, "The triumph of imagination over reality is one of the humors of history." [Will & Ariel Durant, Rousseau and Revolution (1967), p. 64] And the diseased imaginations that power politics are especially indestructible.