

## Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux  
Chairman, Department of Economics  
George Mason University  
[dboudrea@gmu.edu](mailto:dboudrea@gmu.edu)  
<http://www.cafehayek.com>

**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.**

---

18 March 2007

Editor, US News & World Report

To the Editor:

James Pethokoukis is correct that "liberalizing trade for professional services - such as medicine and law - might not only suppress the dramatic income increases in those professions, as [Alan] Greenspan suggests, but also make them more affordable" (Greenspan's Inequality Fix: Free Trade for Lawyers and Doctors," March 16).

Opposition to state licensing has a long and proud pedigree. Writing to William Cullen, MD, in 1774, Adam Smith argued that licensing is a monopoly privilege that lowers the quality of

medical care by artificially keeping many good physicians out and by certifying some quacks. According to Smith, "That in every profession the fortune of every individual should depend as much as possible upon his merit, and as little as possible upon his privilege, is certainly for the interest of the public." (Letter from Adam Smith to William Cullen, 20 Sept. 1774, in Correspondence of Adam Smith (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), pp. 173-179)

14 March 2007

The Editor, The Boston Globe

To the Editor:

Bill McLaughlin rightly points out that declaring in a statute that an act is illegal is insufficient to make that act wrong or

even illegal (Letters, March 14).

Here's language currently on the books in Massachusetts: "A married person who has sexual intercourse with a person not his spouse or an unmarried person who has sexual intercourse with a married person shall be guilty of adultery and shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for not more than three years or in jail for not more than two years or by a fine of not more than five hundred dollars." In short, the Massachusetts government declares adultery to be illegal. But would any jury in your state send such adults to prison, or even fine them, for consensual love-making?

No - which suggests that legality is determined much more by practice and

expectations than by mere statutory language.

13 March 2007

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

To the Editor:

Antonia Juhasz rightly deplores the American military's role in allocating oil reserves in Iraq ("Whose Oil Is It, Anyway?" March 13). But her opposition to private ownership of these reserves is ill-informed. Assets owned in principle by "the people" are owned in practice by the political elite. As recent developments in Venezuela reveal, nationalized assets are used not to promote

economic development but to tighten the elites' grip on power - including the destruction of the very democratic institutions that Ms. Juhasz fantasizes will be used by the people to control "their" assets.

---

12 March 2007

Editor, The Wall Street Journal  
200 Liberty Street  
New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

Kudos to my colleague Russ Roberts for reminding us that fears today of China's investments in dollar-denominated assets are as foolish as were fears 20 years ago of Japan's investments in these assets ("Protectionists Never Learn," March 12). I hope

Paul Krugman reads Russ's essay.

In his June 27, 2005, New York Times column, Krugman argued that China does pose a problem today for the U.S. because the Chinese differ from the Japanese: "One difference is that, judging from early indications, the Chinese won't squander their money as badly as the Japanese did."

What a peculiar theory Krugman peddles: we Americans should welcome foreign investors only if they are wastrels. Responsible investors, Krugman believes, are a threat.

Krugman's theory sounds to me a lot like pop internationalism.