



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.

3 February 2008

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

Dear Editor:

Rick Perlstein suggests that it's petty and unjustified to criticize Sen. Hillary Clinton for earmarking \$1M of taxpayers' funds to pay for a museum at Woodstock ("Getting Past the '60s? It's Not Going to Happen," February 3). His argument is that the amount of money involved is so relatively small - only "one-millionth of the federal budget."

The ethical standards that politicians are held to truly are meager. Mr. Perlstein apparently cares not a whit about the constitutionality of such earmarks, nor about whether they serve the public interest. Earmarks such as this one are okay, in his view, simply because the size of each one is so paltry in comparison with Uncle Sam's budget. I wonder if Mr. Perlstein or Sen. Clinton would excuse me if I refused to pay my taxes this year on grounds that my taxes are an infinitesimal portion of federal revenue.

2 February 2008

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

To the Editor:

Senator Arlen Specter imagines that it is his and his fellow maharajahs' duty to investigate why the NFL destroyed the Patriots' tapes of the Jets ("Goodell Defends Handling of Patriots' Spying Case," February 2).

If I were NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, I would respond to Sen. Specter's threat to call a Senate committee hearing to investigate this matter by saying only

"Dear Sen. Specter: The rule that the Patriots violated is one that the NFL, not Congress, created. We are a private organization quite capable of enforcing our own rules. So butt out; this matter is none of your damn business. Sincerely...."

2 February 2008
Editor, The Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

Discussing sugar-industry recommendations "for better facilitating Nafta's sweetener trade," the American Sugar Alliance's Jack Roney - true to form of all industry lobbyists - argues that the purpose of trade is to generate profits for producers (Letters, February 2). He happily boasts that "Mexico's sugar industry is very supportive of the plan because it will help maximize sugar trade and ensure the economic success of Nafta for both Mexican and U.S. sugar producers."

The thrust of your editorial that prompted Mr. Roney to write is the proper one, namely, that Uncle Sam should stop his long-standing practice of collecting booty for sugar producers by picking the pockets of taxpayers and consumers. Mr. Roney disingenuously changed the subject to the welfare of sugar producers. His only passing acknowledgment of consumers' interest is his suggestion that free trade

in sugar will result in "market chaos" - a suggestion with absolutely no foundation in fact or theory.

31 January 2008

Editor, The Washington Times

Dear Editor:

Re "Obama: decriminalize pot" (January 31): While I support the legalization of all drugs, decriminalizing marijuana would be a great first step. Warned that marijuana is a devilish substance subjecting its users to all sorts of sinister effects, young people who try it quickly realize that such warnings are baseless. So what conclusions do these young people draw about similar warnings against the likes of cocaine and heroine?

Falsely but drum-beatingly insisting to young people that marijuana is such a dangerous substance that its sellers and users deserve jail time does far more, I'm sure, to prompt people to experiment with truly dangerous drugs than does the smoking of pot itself.

30 January 2008

Editor, The Washington Times

Dear Editor:

War-making being the special talent of the state, Patrick McGinn sensibly predicts that war cannot be legislated away (Letters, January 30). But he incorrectly argues that war reflects basic human nature in a world of scarce resources. Virtually all resources are scarce, and yet when they are privately owned and tradable in free markets people seldom fight each other for access to them. For example, my wife and I bought our house peacefully; we didn't have to kill the previous owners to get inside. So, too, with all of the other scarce things that we consume regularly – water, bread, milk, coffee, chicken, wine, hotel rooms, you name it: each of these things is scarce and in high demand, and yet people in market economies almost never fight for them.

Extend commerce and you extend peace.

29 January 2008

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

To the Editor:

Giddy that Sen. Edward Kennedy has endorsed Barack Obama, David Brooks praises the elder pol by saying that "he himself has come to live a life of service" ("The Kennedy Mystique," January 29).

Puhhhh-leezz. Why imply that a Senator serves humankind more than does, say, a physician, a good reporter, or even a Starbucks barista? Just today, the Washington Post has an obituary for the industrial designer Viktor Schreckengost. Among his many other achievements, Mr. Schreckengost improved the handles of children's wagons, designed dinnerware for the mass market, and increased the efficiency of big trucks. Even though few people have ever heard of Viktor Schreckengost - even though he never sported the title "Hon." - even though he never held a position of power - he was surely of enormous service to humankind.

It's time that we stop romanticizing government and the politicians who seek their fame (and often their fortunes) by running it.

29 January 2008

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

To the Editor:

The headline you give to today's eight letters discussing this year's presidential candidates is "The Tug of War for America's Heart" (Letters, January 29).

Behind all the soaring (if vacuous) rhetoric, all the Janus-faced and shameless pandering, and all the sleazy campaign tactics lies one truth: each candidate's lust for power, fame, and the tawdry glory that comes with high political office. Make no mistake: while pretending to tug for my heart, these candidates really are tugging for my freedoms and my wallet.

28 January 2008

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

To the Editor:

Sheryl Crow says about her song "Gasoline" that it "should be perceived as a futuristic song about people who would take to the streets and revolt and take back our freedom from the oppression of gas prices" ("Agit Pop," January 27).

First, some perspective: adjusted for inflation, gasoline at the pump today costs about 20 cents per gallon less than it cost at its peak in March of 1981. Second, just what would people protest? Higher federal taxes at the pump? Perhaps environmental regulations that have transformed a once-national and highly efficient market for refining gasoline into a fragmented hodge-podge struggling to satisfy different state requirements? Or maybe protesters would take aim at government requirements that high-cost ethanol be added to gasoline?

28 January 2008

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

To the Editor:

Brian Wesbury sensibly calms fears about the state of the economy ("The Economy Is Fine (Really)," January 28). One small correction, though. The Fed's disastrous contraction of the money supply in the early 1930s did not alone cause the many bank failures that haunted the United States during the Depression. Also at work undermining bank solvency at this time were restrictions on branch banking.

Research by my colleague Carlos Ramirez and others finds that such restrictions denied banks opportunities to diversify their portfolios sufficiently.[Carlos D. Ramirez, "Did branch banking restrictions increase bank failures? Evidence from Virginia and West Virginia in the late 1920s," *Journal of Economics & Business*, Vol. 55, July-August 2003.] Further research by Mark Carlson and Kris James Mitchener shows that these restrictions muted competition among banks

and, hence, propped up many weak banks. [Mark A. Carlson and Kris James Mitchener, "Branch Banking, Bank Competition, and Financial Stability," NBER Working Paper No. W11291, May 2005.] When the Depression hit, the U.S. was planted thick with inefficient small banks that could not then survive.