

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

DAVID WILLIAMS

*"I don't care that you're a professor of literature. You've got a beard and a belly, and we're broke!"*

NOTE

Letters to the editor may be mailed to 1255 23rd Street, N.W., Washington 20037; faxed to (202) 452-1033; or sent by e-mail to editor@chronicle.com. Please include a daytime telephone number.

The large volume of letters prompts this suggestion: Limit the length to 500 words. In the competition for space, short letters must sometimes be given preference. Letters may be edited and condensed. They may also be posted on *The Chronicle's* Web site.

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*The Environment Meets the Market*

TO THE EDITOR:

Malcolm G. Scully's article on the largely unexplored common ground that exists between environmentalists and libertarians was a basic but accurate introduction to a set of policy mechanisms that I hope will prove to be of great importance ("Saving the Environment: Money Talks," *The Review*, November 23). He erred, however, when he implied that libertarians are conservatives. . . .

We libertarians are liberals in the classic sense of the word, as in "liberal education." We most definitely are not political conservatives. You will not, for example, find libertarians supporting the government's current assault on civil liberties, or the federalization of airport security.

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TO THE EDITOR:

Those free-market environmentalists are BS-ing to an extreme degree. The principle of competition requires each producer to cut costs to the maximum possible extent. . . . This is why businesses move from country to country or even from state to state in seeking low-cost venues.

The principle of competition also requires that more be made available to consumers than they want to buy, so that each consumer can have as many alternatives as possible from which to choose when making a purchase. . . .

The discipline of economics is devoted to convincing us that anarchy (every producer seeking his own interests at whatever cost to other producers) moves toward equilibrium. Anyone who can truly believe that is guilty of extreme self-brainwashing. Would that it were otherwise, but the idea of solving environmental problems within market parameters is silly.

The wolf example is a case in point. It was not the market that guaranteed compensation of ranchers, but a relief fund. The market cannot guarantee this outcome, let alone do it in perpetuity.

Economics, moreover, assumes that resources are limitless, a necessary assumption for competition. Hence, those who would solve "the tragedy of the commons" by limiting production must move beyond markets (as in the example), then move into rationing. We have made some progress in cutting back on "overfishing," but this has required putting fishermen out of business. This is regulation, not a free market.

Essentially, these people are talking about cartels, then calling them free markets. Bull!

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