

A Former Economist

January 17, 2019

Paul Krugman, *New York Times* columnist and former economist, tested our patience last week with “Trump’s Big Libertarian Experiment.” How many *non sequiturs* will squeak past the Gray Lady’s editorial department?



Loads — and all about how the federal government shutdown gives limited government folks what they want: less government.

Subsidy checks to farmers aren’t going out, as “libertarian organizations like Cato” have long advocated. Sure. But it’s no policy change.

As soon as there’s a budget deal, those checks will be made up.

Further, “businesspeople are furious that

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But it isn’t spoiled food.
Or freedom.*

the Small Business Administration isn’t making loans.”

Well, it’s high time businesses were weaned off the SBA teat — and a few whiners do not a case for subsidy make.

And then there’s the Food and Drug

Administration, which can no longer inspect foods. Since “there’s a long conservative tradition, going back to Milton Friedman, that condemns the F.D.A.’s existence as an unwarranted interference in the free market” libertarians must be pleased, eh?

There is also a long tradition among economists that says businesses don’t get rich poisoning their customers, and that there are many mechanisms in place — and, barring the FDA, more *would* be in place — to ensure customers that they won’t be infected by eating . . . Romaine lettuce.

Which then Krugman admits . . . as if he had belatedly recalled Friedman’s lesson in *Capitalism and Freedom*. He concedes that the shutdown is not the way Friedman would go about limiting government. Besides, “libertarian ideology isn’t a real force within the G.O.P.”

So what’s the point?

Krugman ends with talk of a smell test: *does lack of food inspections smell like freedom?*

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This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.