



Snapshots from the editorial advisory board

Marc Raizman, Shirley Scoville, Ed Byrne, Brian T. Schwartz
Saturday, July 4, 2009

Even in these uncertain economic times the United States is regarded as the world's industrial leader. But we are behind the rest of the world in one area, and that is our unwillingness to fully adopt the metric system.

We are the only industrialized country in the world that doesn't use the metric system, which is now called the International System of Units, SI for short. Anyone who has ever used the metric system will tell you that it is a simpler, more logical, easier system to use.

Acceptance of SI in this country has been slow. Still, all U.S. scientists use SI units. Physicians do their measuring and prescriptions in SI units. We could begin by adopting kilometers for our highways.

Car speedometers already carry both MPH and KPH. We could drop fahrenheit and adopt celsius as the temperature measurement. We ought to start teaching the metric system in our schools.

Conversion will cost money, time and effort but once the change-over is complete these problems disappear. To join the European Union, England adopted the SI system in 1975 although many of the old measurements are still part of British life. The cost of our not being metric is high. All exported goods must be in metrics or they won't sell. All packaged goods now carry both the standard and metric measurement on their labels.

Recently a multimillion-dollar Martian probe was destroyed because some navigational data was in feet and some in meters.

We owe a note of thanks to the National Institute of Sciences and Technology (NIST) for leading this country in encouraging the use of the SI system

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I find it enlivening the U.S. Supreme Court rules on constitutional matters. In the case of the New Haven firefighters, the Court ruled Monday the New Haven Fire Department violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by throwing out test results where no blacks qualified for a promotion. Much more could be said about this case, but the point today is U.S. citizens and the Constitution are the final say.

In another matter, that of a treaty, the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, we're not getting a bargain with President Obama. He's actively trying to find ways to give away our nation's sovereignty to an 18-member group in Geneva, Switzerland. Again, much more will be written about the strengths and flaws of this treaty itself, but the bottom line is, our nation should not bend to governance by any other nation. Treaties need to be constitutional or not ratified by the U.S. Plain and simple, firefighters had the Constitution to benefit them and so should mothers and fathers wanting a say in raising their children.

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On July 9, the homeowners of Boulder, and their children, and their children's children, have an opportunity to tell Boulder's city leaders -- again -- that number-driven home size restrictions do not effectively address neighborhood compatibility design-based challenges. The unintended consequences that may flow from poorly chosen floor area ratio (FAR) caps ought not be trifled with.

For one example, if a .45 FAR is adopted by City Council, a home appraisal based on the city's current .8 FAR (that's right, we already have a cap) that was used to refinance or obtain a reverse mortgage could go "under water" after losing a significant portion of its value. Here's why: A 7,000 square-foot lot's development limit would fall from 5,600 square-feet to 3,150 square-feet. Let's say your 30-year-old home already has 2,800 square feet. How much renovation to improve your home's energy efficiency can you afford to make, if you can only expand your home by 350 square feet (about 17 feet by 20 feet)? How much will someone pay you (your parents or your grandparents) for your family's home and lot with such limits in place?

Building permit-based regulations that require state-of-the-art materials and methods improve our housing stock, but only at a pace of 1/10th of 1 percent per year. Squeezing home sizes down simply reduces or eliminates any financial incentive to pull a permit. We'll never make meaningful headway unless we shift our focus to ways we, as a community, can provide meaningful support to homeowners who are willing to personally sacrifice to reduce our *region's* carbon footprint.

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"The 'public plan' will be the only plan" says health care economist Scott Harrington of the proposed government-run health plan.

Be suspicious: "public plan" supporters *want* it to be the only plan.

President Obama uses rhetoric of "choice" and "competition" to push the "public plan." But his ideal is single-payer health care, where there is -- by definition -- a government monopoly that prohibits both choice and competition. If "public plan" supporters honestly wanted choice and competition, why do they oppose policies that would make Medicaid and Medicare compete? For example, vouchers that Medicaid and Medicare recipients can use to buy commercial insurance. Or better yet, allow taxpayers to opt out of funding these programs by getting tax credits for donations to comparable charities.

A "public plan" would not even compete fairly with insurance companies. It would have access to tax dollars, and many other advantages. As professor Harrington concludes, "equal competition between a government health-insurance plan and private plans would be impossible.

"If a government health "program were to be stripped of any special advantages it would cease to be a government program. It would be just another private insurer," writes Michael Cannon of the Cato Institute.

If politicians truly want more competitive insurance markets, they should remove the tax code's bias for employer-provided insurance, which shields insurers from competing directly for patients' business. But politicians covet votes most. Since the biased tax code empowers unions, Democrats are not likely to touch it without giving unions special treatment.

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(The Camera's editorial advisory board members are: Anne B. Butterfield, Jimmy Calano, Ed Byrne, Clay Evans, Steve Pomerance, Marc Raizman, Brian T. Schwartz and Shirley Scoville.)



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