

Matt Yglesias

Feb 26th, 2010 at 12:16 pm

Where Do Rich Lowry and Ramesh Ponnuru Get Their Policy Models From

The particulars of mass transit aside, another thing that annoyed me about the previously mentioned [Lowry & Ponnuru paragraph about how liberals hate America](#) was their effort to establish some kind of presumption against looking at other countries for models of good policy ideas: “The Left’s search for a foreign template to graft onto America grew more desperate. Why couldn’t we be more like them — like the French, like the Swedes, like the Danes? Like any people with a larger and busier government overawing the private sector and civil society?”



Bike sharing in Barcelona -- a good idea from abroad that Washington, DC has emulated (my cc photo)

In this telling, there’s something insidious about asking if they don’t do something better someplace else. But of course another way of looking at it is that you by definition can’t find examples of alternatives to the US status quo by looking at the US. That’s why you regularly see the Cato Institute touting [Chile’s pension system](#) or Heritage extolling the virtues of [Sweden’s K-12 education](#) or David Frum talking up [French nuclear power](#). After all, we’ve never attempted to shift from a guaranteed pay-as-you-go pension system to a mandatory savings one in the United States. Nor do we have any examples of widespread operation of public elementary schools by for-profit firms. Nor do we have a robust nuclear power sector. So if you want to explore these ideas—ideas that conservatives often do want to explore—you need to look at models from abroad.

And there's nothing wrong with that! So why isn't it okay for liberals to talk about French health care or Finnish education or Danish energy policy? As Barack Obama once said, when you look at the right sometimes it's like they're proud of being ignorant.

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41 Responses to “Where Do Rich Lowry and Ramesh Ponnuru Get Their Policy Models From”

1. *JH* Says:

[February 26th, 2010 at 12:22 pm](#)

So why isn't it okay for liberals to talk about French health care or Finnish education or Danish energy policy?

Because STFU, that's why.

2. *doofman* Says:

[February 26th, 2010 at 12:23 pm](#)

Sometimes?

3. *Short Bus Bully* Says:

[February 26th, 2010 at 12:24 pm](#)

Proud of being ignorant? You betcha. Remember, it's always the “intellectuals” who are among the first to be rounded up during an authoritarian Purge...

4. *beyond left* Says:

[February 26th, 2010 at 12:29 pm](#)

Why would repiglicans want to look at successful models of things that they don't want to change? Willful ignorance is synonymous with repiglican. They are happy to look at foreign models of things they want to do (like dismantle social security and hamstring k-12 education), but even policies that entertain wide public support (the public option) are outside repiglican blinders.

5. *RickDFL* Says:

[February 26th, 2010 at 12:30 pm](#)

I thought the core of ‘American Exceptionalism’ was our ability to steal the best ideas from around the world. While other countries were weighed down by the dead hand of custom, we were free to pick and choose the best ideas from wherever we found them.

6. *Morgan Warstler* Says:

[February 26th, 2010 at 12:35 pm](#)