

FINAL WORD ⇨ BY A. BARTON HINKLE

Big Government's Work Is Never Done

“When can we quit passing laws and raising taxes?” P.J. O’Rourke asked rhetorically many years ago. “When can we say of our political system, ‘Stick a fork in it, it’s done?’”

Ask politicians and other government officials that question, and they’re likely to snort coffee out their noses. Done? How do you ever finish a project as expansive as transforming the whole of society by, say, eliminating perceived unfairness?

That’s the goal of the recent Federal Communications Commission’s proposal to ban early termination fees charged by cable and satellite companies, i.e., fees assessed when customers opt out of their contracts earlier than they agreed to. President Biden has labeled such fees “unfair.” He doesn’t explain *why* they’re unfair, but FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel offered a clue when she said, “No one wants to pay junk fees for something they don’t want or can’t use.”

Well, *of course* nobody wants to pay for things they no longer want. But then, they also don’t want to pay for things they *do* want, like, say, a college education. And why should they? Or so goes the thinking in the White House, which recently announced *yet another* round of student loan forgiveness. To date, the Biden administration has canceled more than \$150 billion in student loans for more than four million individuals. In the process, it has transferred those costs to taxpayers—many of whom never went to college—and made it easier for colleges and universities to continue jacking up tuition at a pace far exceeding inflation. ’Twas a famous victory for fairness and justice.

Back at the FCC, Rosenworcel doesn’t



want to stop with termination fees. She also wants to ban the use of AI-generated voices in robocalls, which she says are “already sowing confusion by tricking consumers into thinking scams and frauds are legitimate.” Of course, scams and frauds already are illegal, but why enforce existing laws when you can expand government’s reach instead?

The Biden administration also wants to prohibit menthol cigarettes, fees charged when transactions are declined at the point of sale for insufficient funds, hidden fees for concert tickets and hotel rooms, federal contractors and subcontractors asking about salary history during hiring, and much, much more.

The fight against unfairness continues at the state and local levels. In New York State, Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara has proposed banning “surge

pricing” in restaurants. Changing prices when demand changes—an elementary economic principle—is “unfair,” he says. Like Biden, he also doesn’t say why it’s unfair, or even why it’s any less fair than the other two ways of allocating finite resources: long lines and rank favoritism.

In Florida, the legislature has banned lab-grown meat and will punish those who grow or sell it. Following other states, Virginia is on the verge of banning flavored vape products. Washington state lawmaker Amy Walen wants to ban new gas-powered outdoor equipment such as lawnmowers. Atlanta city councilman Antonio Lewis wants to outlaw ski masks and “people who have their hoodies on that cover up everything but their eyes.” Some officials in Sugar Land, TX, want to ban new tobacco and vape shops. Tennessee lawmaker Kirk Halston wants to ban emotional support animals from restaurants. Back in New York State, Gov. Kathy Hochul wants to prohibit copayments for insulin and forbid hospitals from suing for nonpayment anyone earning less than 400 percent of the federal poverty level (that’s \$120,000 for a family of four).

All these efforts and so many, many more ultimately are justified by what officials say is fair and unfair. And therein lies the problem. When government officials think their job is not merely to protect individual rights but to obviate whatever they deem objectionable, their task is never done and never will be.

As C.S. Lewis wrote:

Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron’s cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.

No wonder politicians turn elected office into a career. Their work, truly, is never done—at least, as they see it. **R**