

Fair versus Unfortunate

Our Editorial Board recently had an interesting conversation about the concepts of “Fair” and “Unfortunate”.

Much of the political debate within our country over the past several years has revolved around the issue of what is fair. But before we address that question, we should first re-emphasize that our Editorial Board believes the primary focus of the federal government should be directed “outward” - - towards our country’s relationships with other countries in the world. The federal government’s primary role is one of protection - protecting the country as a whole (not special interest groups). We feel that many of our country’s political problems have arisen since the 1960s because the federal government’s focus has become redirected towards “internal” issues. “Progressives” feel that the federal government should be free to initiate and grow any program that is needed to “solve” any problem that the government decides needs to be fixed, including whatever issue the government deems to be unfair.

Interestingly, the issue of fairness was evoked eleven times during the Democratic debate on October 13, 2015, and fiscal responsibility was mentioned only once (by Lincoln Chafee). The country’s growing debt problem was not mentioned once during the Democratic debate, so there was never any chance to discuss whether this issue is fair to future generations. (But we digress)...

One of the key problems with the issue of fairness is that it entails a “values judgment”. One person’s definition of what is fair might not be the same as the next person’s. So you spend a lot of time and energy trying to convince someone else that your definition of fairness is correct. In order to resolve a situation that someone deems to be unfair, you need to “trade resources” between individuals - - you need to take something away from someone, to give it to another, to make things fair. If you take this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, the only answer to the question of fairness (in regards to economic issues) is that Communism is the only solution that is truly fair. Unfortunately (fortunately?) history has provided definitive proof that Communism is not the solution to the issue of fairness. So if the solution is not Communism, is the answer to the fairness question Senator Bernie Sanders’ proposals for “Democratic Socialism”? We think not.

We believe that it is impossible for a government to engineer fairness. We are also sure that one of the Pearls of Wisdom that your mother passed on to you at a very young age is that “Life is not fair”. The progressive agenda is devoted towards trying to prove that your mother is wrong.

There is a fundamental difference between “fair” and “unfortunate”. Is it unfair, say, that your passion in life is to play basketball in the NBA, but you’re only 5’8” tall (and you don’t have the skills)? Unfortunately, this is unfortunate. Is it unfair that you would like to live in a 15,000 square foot house with a full-size indoor basketball court, but you don’t have the financial means? Is it unfair that there are people who do have the physical skills to play in the NBA and/or live in a 15,000 square foot house with a full-size indoor basketball court? We believe that most people would answer this last question “No, this is not unfair”.

We recognize that the above illustration is a bit extreme. So let’s bring the issue down to the context of “life’s bare necessities” (food, shelter, education, healthcare). Is it unfair that because of your level of education, your skills, or some other aspect of your personal life, that it is difficult for you to earn a

“median” annual income that is above the federal poverty guideline amount? We don’t believe that this is unfair, but we agree that this is probably unfortunate.

So what is the federal government’s role in regards to “fair” versus “unfortunate”?

In regards to “fair” - - we believe that the federal government has a responsibility to support the concept of “Opportunity for All, Favoritism to None”. We believe the government has a role to play to ensure that all Americans live in a society that has a level playing field - an equal opportunity (not necessarily an equal end result). This was one of the positive outcomes that came out of the country’s civil rights movement during the 1960s. America has eliminated many of the laws that were being used to maintain a tilted playing field. The flip side of equal opportunity is that the government should not foster any favoritism towards any “subset” of the population. This would include homeowners versus renters, public servants versus people who work in the private sector, members of any particular religion or any particular racial group, people with a particular disability (more on this later), Wall Street firms, banks that are too big to fail, oil companies, solar energy companies, wind energy companies, labor unions, companies that export products to other countries, etc.

In regards to “unfortunate” - - we believe that the federal government does not have a direct role to play, because it is not possible for the government to solve any particular individual’s personal issue. However, as we mention in The 2020 Initiative, we do believe that the federal government does have a role to play via its income tax policies, to ensure that appropriate funds are available to Not For Profit charitable organizations, so that those organizations can fulfill their mission to provide social services to any and all citizens who need assistance. This is the role of civil society (families, supported by friends and neighbors, religious organizations, and Not For Profit charitable organizations). The federal government should eliminate all of its programs that attempt to solve every unfortunate situation. The federal government’s poverty programs have been an abject failure. Local food banks, Habitat for Humanity organizations, educational Not For Profit organizations, medical Not For Profit organizations, and other social service agencies that provide specific, targeted solutions are a much better option, compared to any program run by the federal government.