

IN ALL FAIRNESS

Cartoons Spark Outrage

Have pity on the Rugrats. Spare a moment of sympathy for Tony the Tiger and Toucan Sam.

These blameless cartoon characters are about to feel the fury of wannabe superheroes without capes, radicals who expose their prejudice against free enterprise through lawsuits. Our cartoon friends are soon to be the targets of activist lawsuits against Kellogg and Nickelodeon — a blatant attempt at consumer regulation by lawsuit and an incursion into parents' decision-making.

Two anti-business groups, the Center for Science in the Public Interest and the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, have vowed to sue each company for \$1 billion in damages. The "we-know-what's-best-for-everyone" crowd claims that all ads for foods they disapprove of are "unfair and deceptive" when seen by kids. They have also declared illegal the use of cartoon characters on the foods that the groups have placed on their "enemies list."

The food-police plaintiffs claim that food advertisements viewed by children are illegal if they advertise "nutritionally poor" products — based on the plaintiffs' own definition, not on any government standards. Among the targeted foods: 2% milk and whole milk, Eggo frozen waffles, and Campbell's soups. Yes, even chicken noodle soup.

Save Tony the Tiger

Their lawsuits are self-satirical. These professional activists seek to apply outrageous theories of liability to ordinary foods that many, if not most, responsible families have in their pantries and refrigerators. The groups have also vowed to sue soda makers for selling sodas — along with bottled water and juices — to high school students. The Starbuck's coffee that many of us enjoy will no doubt be next on the enemies list for its "addictive" caffeine.

The lifestyle enforcers are on yet another bogus public interest crusade, seeking lucrative court victories and settlements. They're victimizing consumers for the sake of their own bank accounts. At the same time, they're seeking to substitute their own judgment for parents' viewing and buying decisions. Simply put, they think that parents can't be trusted with decisions about what their own children eat and drink.

Aren't there more pressing health issues? If the Naderites want to protect Americans' health, they should work to make the latest drugs and medical devices available to sick patients. Instead, their efforts are geared toward exactly the opposite. They use health and children merely as excuses to attack corporate America and our consumer freedom.

The notions of these activists, with their anti-choice agenda, enjoy scant public support. That's why they're using the courts to impose a paternalistic way of life. Who needs the public when you can make an end-run around the democratic process by working with plaintiffs' lawyers and unelected bureaucrats?

Every time government is allowed to dictate fundamental choices to consumers, we drift further toward a culture of control. Isn't that a high price for us to pay just to satisfy an ideological agenda?



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