

wasted hours, and been browbeaten in the bargain. Experts say he has to walk out of the showroom three times, and drive off at least once, to get a fair price on a car.

Then, just when the poor schnook thinks he got a decent deal (thanks to the salesman's congratulations and the rueful looks of the manager), he discovers that his neighbor spent \$1,000 less. Economists who study this routine say dealers have five or six shells to hide their per-car profit under, whether it's the terms of financing, the "rebate," the options, or whatever. It takes a virtual car-market scientist to figure it out.

Price guides help, but the market isn't perfect, any more than man is perfect. And the whole business is so unpleasant that the left has used it to attack capitalism itself. Empirical studies have shown that men get better prices than women, and whites better than blacks, which has led for calls for more regulation.

That's a terrible idea, but, honestly, what person doesn't hate the whole process? Shopping for almost everything else is fun. Why does the car market appear to fail?

But—competition to the rescue—it hasn't, for the Saturn Division of General Motors instituted the no-haggle price. (Mercedes Benz was first, but most people didn't notice.) Posting the actual selling price was Saturn's best move, and it became the talk of the industry. The Saturn is a fine car, but its real advan-

tage is that you know the price and are under no pressure.

Under *customer* pressure, however, other car companies went along. "Value pricing" makes it more difficult to sock it to the vulnerable, but competition forced dealers into it.

But Ms. Bingaman, the nation's chief "trustbuster," says this pro-consumer reform violates federal laws against "vertical pricing." She is investigating past and present officers of the National Automobile Dealers Association, demanding their phone records and every scrap of paper they might have scribbled a note on.

Ms. Bingaman says this harassment is necessary to stop exploitation. In fact, she is promoting it. Above-board prices are exactly what consumers want, or at least the non-rug dealer contingent.

Value pricing means Americans don't have to make a deal with people they suspect are even lower than Congressmen. At last, salesmen can answer questions and tell consumers what they should like about the car. They can be sellers instead of dissemblers.

Saturn-style pricing has sometimes led to lower prices, and sometimes to higher ones. The main point is that it has made car shopping less akin to tooth drilling. So Ms. Bingaman proposes to restore the pain, in the name of the consumer.

Along with the Justice De-

partment, the real villains of the antitrust process have always been the big companies that use the government to cripple their competitors. Is the flood of big corporate contributions to her husband, a U.S. Senator from New Mexico, after she was appointed, a coincidence? With Microsoft, the complaint was brought by other software companies. Who can doubt that some auto businesses prefer shell-game pricing, and are willing to lobby for it?

Economists joke that if a price is too high, it's "gouging," if it's too low, it's "predatory," and if it's the same, it's "colluding." Now the joke is on the government, which thinks private enterprise can't do anything right. ■

The White Fortress

by L.H.R., Jr.

As recently as the 1920s, an American could walk up to the front door of the White House and knock. But with the Roosevelt Revolution, and the growing size and power of the central state, the presidential mansion began to be cut off.

This was necessary. After all, if the government was going to claim the power and ability to cure all social ills, then the President would be a lightning rod.

Or a target, and the other day, when the White House

was fired on for the first time since the War of 1812, the Secret Service took out its wish list, which includes closing off Pennsylvania Avenue. No, no, said Bill Clinton. This is the "people's house," and it must be accessible. We can't inconvenience drivers and tourists.

But the Secret Service is right. The White House must be secured, and not only for reasons of presidential safety. The grounds should be larger, and a high wall, topped with razor wire, should enclose them. Pennsylvania and other avenues should be closed off. Lafayette Park should be a security bunker. There should be massive gates, guard towers, barracks for presidential troops, and machine-gun nests. A few searchlights

would be nice as well.

When Americans see the present White House, and its plain wrought iron fence, it's too easy to think of the republic of the founders. You can forget, for a moment, this globe-girdling empire, the biggest, richest, most-powerful government in world history.

The Leviathan state not only taxes us into poverty, it subverts our families, communities, and businesses, and ruins other countries too. And it shoots people, here and abroad. Caesar can't be housed in Andy Jackson's house. The President needs a palace of menace.

If drivers and tourists are inconvenienced, so much the better. Then they can contemplate what's happened to America. ■

And then there are the practical concerns. Already, the "service" available from New York City's massive bureaucracy is famously bad. Long lines and surly workers are the norm, as is mind-numbing ineptitude. But add 150,000 welfare clients, by and large the least competent people in society, and citizens will long for the days of mere rudeness and stupidity. The New York welfare culture is a violent one, after all, and a request, or even a direct gaze, can be interpreted as a challenge to fight.

Although "workfare" will cost much more in tax money, the only organized opposition has come from public-sector unions, who want the civil service trough all to themselves. But think, for example, of the effect of making workfare apply only to the childless. The work-averse can easily fix that by having kids, meaning that illegitimacy will increase.

More important, workfare replicates the central fault of the negative income tax and all the other welfare half-measures that have been floating around the Republican left for 25 years. It attempts to resolve the inherent contradiction of the welfare state while keeping the dough flowing to the clients.

No liberal and few conservatives can admit to that contradiction: that welfare rewards and therefore encourages the very condition it is supposed to alleviate. If we gave cash subsidies to people

Giuliani's Futile Reform

by L.H.R., Jr.

Following the pathetic example of Mikhail Gorbachev, U.S. politicians are proposing semi-repairs to the welfare state. Bill Clinton is chief reformer, but he's joined by the mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, who wants to put 150,000 welfare recipients to work.

Like so much in government, that sounds good while actually being terrible. Giuliani knows that the public is outraged over the taxpayer exploitation, social cost, crime, and illegitimacy associated with welfare. So he wants to make childless, able-bodied welfare recipients work 9 to 5.

What's wrong with that? Well, he wants to do it not by terminating their dole, but by disguising and increasing it. He wants them to "work" for the city.

People who laze around the street corner soaking up tax dollars should support themselves. But ensconcing them in government offices is hardly the way to do it. Make-work jobs are anti-productive from an economic standpoint, and they further entrench the disastrous idea that it is moral to live off others without their consent.