



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on June 7, 2012

House Approves Measure to Stall Light-Bulb Efficiency Standards

House Republicans passed two amendments on a spending bill Tuesday that would [bar](#) the federal government from imposing light bulb standards that critics say are too meddlesome. Passed through a voice vote, the provision would amend the Energy and Water spending bill for 2013 by preventing the Energy Department from spending money to enforce bulb efficiency regulations that were established in a law passed during the Bush administration.



Under the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, the phase-out was slated to commence in January 2012, which banned the sale of all 100-watt bulbs, as well as the sale of all 75-watt bulbs by July 2013. But a spending bill passed last December stalled the mandate until this October.

The discussion over energy-efficient light bulbs became especially contentious late last year, as the January 1 deadline neared. Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said the December provision showed that Congress is becoming more aware of the American people's desires. "We heard the message loud and clear," the Congressman [affirmed](#). "Americans don't want government standards determining how they light their homes."

Tuesday's amendment, sponsored by Rep. Michael Burgess (R-Texas), says the federal government has no authority to mandate the use of certain light bulbs. "We shouldn't be making these decisions for the American people," Burgess said Tuesday on the House floor. "People are sick of the government treading where it just doesn't belong."

"The law couldn't be enforced," he [added](#) in an interview. "We don't need no stinkin' badges. We're the energy police."

Despite its swift passage, the language in the amendment ignited a brief debate in which Rep. Pete Visclosky (D-Ind.) said the way it read could imperil U.S. manufacturers that have already doled out millions of dollars to comply with the standards. "The only benefit to this amendment is to allow foreign manufacturers who may not feel a similar obligation to export noncompliant light bulbs that will not only harm the investments made by U.S. companies but place at risk U.S. manufacturing jobs associated with making compliant bulbs," Visclosky contended.

Another amendment passed on Tuesday, authored by Rep. Chip Cravaack (R-Minn.), would prohibit the Energy Department from spending money to enforce standards that would force universities and other grant recipients to use only energy-efficient bulbs.

Some critics decried the Republicans' effort at squelching the regulation, claiming that prohibiting the Energy Department from enforcing such standards could let unscrupulous foreign companies push non-compliant products, particularly to bulk purchasers such as builders.

"Some in Congress are willing to put U.S. jobs at risk for political positioning," charged Joseph Higbee,



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a spokesman for the National Electrical Manufacturers Association. “This is an example of a few politicizing light bulbs at the risk of American workers and the economy.”

Christina Angelide of the Natural Resources Defense Council echoed Higbee’s concerns. “It’s worrisome enough that House Republicans would risk hurting U.S. manufacturers and put thousands of jobs in jeopardy at a time when our country needs them most,” she wrote in a [blog post](#). “What’s even more troubling though is that their actions are completely out of step with the majority of Americans.”

However, critics on the other side of the debate point out the injustices of an all-powerful government that mandates consumer behaviors. *Reason* magazine’s senior editor Jacob Sullum, for example, [suggests](#) that market behavior can only be dictated through natural consumer reactions. In other words, when new products are introduced to the market, consumers themselves will decide when or whether such products are viable — and this notion is particularly acute when newer, alternative products have a high price disparity:

... I would be happy to purchase the bulbs the Energy Department thinks I should have if they worked better than they do and did not cost so much. But my experience with CFLs has been that they cost a lot more, do not last nearly as long as advertised, and do not perform the basic function of quickly illuminating a room nearly as well. LEDs may be better, but they are at this point absurdly expensive. Halogen bulbs and the new, extra-efficient incandescents are not quite as pricey, but they still cost around 10 times as much as the banned bulbs. ...

Most importantly, though, is the federal government’s unabashed control over personal property, as the act of regulating certain household goods is, in a way, regulating the inside of a person’s home. Mr. Sullum boldly laid out his views on the matter: “So it really irritates me when I’m told either that I don’t know what I’m talking about when it comes to products that I use every day or that my preferences are stupid. Even if they were, I should have a right to be stupid with my own money and my own house.”

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