Consumers Should Hang Up on the Gore Phone Tax

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The Conventional Wisdom circulating in Capitol cloakrooms is that Republicans should not move forward on impeachment of Bill Clinton because (a) polls show the public is nonchalant about his sins and (b) the fear of running against Al Gore as incumbent President in 2000. Republicans are misjudging public opinion on both counts.

Our Watergate experience proves that polls can plunge precipitously after impeachment proceedings begin to expose evidence of obstruction of justice, which, in Clinton's case, includes selling vital U.S. missile technology for campaign contributions. Al Gore can even be an easier target to defeat than Slick Willie.

Gore can be hung with his peculiar fundraising from the Buddhist monks and his gaffe about "no controlling legal authority." They will make delicious visuals and soundbites that can be looped in TV spots.

Gore can be hung with his book "Earth in the Balance," in which he urged "eliminating the internal combustion engine" (i.e., the automobile) by the year 2017. As the old adage warns, Would that mine enemy had written a book.

Gore can be hung with the Global Warming Treaty because he agreed in Kyoto to cut American energy consumption to seven percent below our 1990 levels. Such a drastic reduction in U.S. standard of living in order to appease envious Third Worlders would affect every American rich or poor, worker or jobless.

Republicans don't have to wait to open their attack on the fruitcake follies of the futurist Gore, who has staked his political reputation on allying himself with wacko environmentalism and government manipulation of the Internet. All his schemes involve higher and hidden taxes, oppressive federal or even global regulations, and payoffs to political pals.

Republicans should open fire immediately on the Gore phone tax, which involves all these elements and burdens everyone who uses a telephone. There are no exemptions, no deductions, no credits, no cap or floor, no way to escape this obnoxious Gore phone tax.

The Gore phone tax, sometimes called the e-rate or Universal Service Fund, and sometimes not itemized at all, is simply added to everyone's monthly phone bill. Of course, your phone bill must be paid monthly or your service is cut off, an even more effective technique than demands from the IRS.

This Gore tax on every phone customer has already started producing a billion dollars in new federal tax receipts. The revenues are designated to flow directly under the control of the number-one Clinton-Gore special-interest lobby, the teachers unions.

The stated purpose of this phone tax to carry out Al Gore's pet project of connecting every public school classroom and library to the Internet. But the big majority of schools are already Internet-connected.

The public school administrators and consultants, however, know a cash cow when they see one. They are now engaged in a grant-writing frenzy that has already produced $2 billion in grant applications to pay for a long list of school services that may be as distantly related to Internet connections as carpets and paint.

This tax-and-spend boondoggle was slated to begin by paying a salary of $200,000 to a Gore fundraiser, Ira Fishman. Congress reacted to this revelation by reducing his tax-paid salary to "only" $150,000, while the General Accounting Office declared illegal the quasi-private agency he headed.

None of these new tax revenues will go to teach schoolchildren the basics. Students are not going to learn reading, writing and arithmetic by surfing the Internet.

When the government imposes more taxes, the public loses at both ends. It costs our hard-earned money when the tax is collected, and it does all kinds of mischief when the bureaucrats spend it. Letting the feds finance the Internet connection to all public schools is an efficient means of controlling the curriculum, a major objective of the Clinton-Gore Administration.

Ever since the landslide repudiation of Big Government in 1994, politicians have been afraid to raise taxes again. Unfortunately, some of them think they can get by with imposing sales taxes rather than

income taxes (which was the devious rationale behind the effort to pass a gigantic tobacco tax).

The Gore phone tax was initially planned to be levied secretly so that the public wouldn't be aware of paying it, and the FCC pressured phone companies not to disclose the tax to their customers. But many phone companies are refusing to take the hit of raising their rates without identifying the federal mandate that forced the increase.

The Gore tax will be included on your next monthly phone bill and, if you can't locate it, demand that your phone company identify it for you. Then forward it to the person who should pay it: your Congressman who slipped this stealth tax into the 1996 Telecom Act.