Tell Big Brother To Get Out Of Our Washing Machines

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Few changes in our society have done as much to liberate women from the drudgery of "women's work" as the washing machine. American ingenuity and the private enterprise system combined to provide us with a wide variety of models of this convenient labor-saving appliance, the envy of women all over the world.
Some 81 million households are equipped with washing machines and 10 million are bought every year. But Big Brother Busybodies in the Clinton-Gore Administration want to take off the market the models that Americans have been buying, and then force us to change to a style the environmental extremists claim will reduce global warming.

This is the same Administration that sanctimoniously espouses "a woman's right to choose." But it wants to deny us the right to choose the kind of washing machine that sales data prove we prefer.

In a back room deal without consumers or taxpayers present, the Clinton-Gore environmentalists conspired with industry to mandate the manufacture of only front-loading, instead of top-loading, washing machines. The mandate requires elimination of the agitator which is the element that washes our clothes.

Front-loading washers are available now but they make up less than 12 percent of sales. So Big Brother's attitude is, let's force people to buy front-loading washers.

On October 5, the Department of Energy (DOE) proposed two new regulations, one for clothes washers and the other for residential air conditioners and heat pumps. Not many homemakers make a practice of reading notices in the Federal Register, and the 60-day comment period will expire just as households are busy getting ready for Christmas.

DOE Secretary Bill Richardson had the nerve to issue a press release claiming the new regulation will bring "big savings for consumers and the environment." However, the regulations will actually add $240 to the price of a clothes washer, $274 to the price of a residential central air conditioner, and $486 to the price of a residential heat pump.

In addition, a load of laundry will take about 10 minutes longer to wash than in ordinary washers and will require a special detergent. If the housewife uses her ordinary detergent, it over-suds; if she cuts back on the amount, her clothes won't get clean.

The reason for these mandates is that the Gore-style environmentalists want to reduce the amount of water and electricity Americans use in order to comply with United Nations treaties about energy, even if the United States hasn't ratified them. And they don't care how much this costs consumers or how much it reduces our standard of living.

Where does the Department of Energy (DOE) get the authority to upset housewives all over America with these draconian rules? A 1987 law, the National Appliance Energy Conservation Act , authorized the DOE to impose efficiency standards in order to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil. The Clinton-Gore environmentalists are trying to exploit this law to implement the Kyoto Protocol on Global Warming, a treaty so extreme that the Senate has refused to ratify it.

These regulations come from the same mindset of the bureaucrats who in 1992 banned the sale of toilets that use more than 1.6 gallons of water per flush. Today there is a flourishing black market in old-style toilets because the new toilets simply can't carry out the mission assigned to toilets.

The 1.6-gallon toilets don't help the environment, either, because it usually take two flushes to do the job that the old-style toilets can accomplish with one flush.

Don't look to big business to defend us from the federal environmentalists who are now licking their chops at the prospect of dictating all our energy use if Al Gore is elected President. The appliance manufacturers are glad to support the new rule to force us to buy the more expensive front-loading washing machines that otherwise don't sell.

One manufacturer said, "selling it in the marketplace is easy if there's a [government] standard in place." A press release from Whirlpool "commends" DOE for requiring Americans to buy and use the more expensive energy-efficiency appliances "because consumers have historically shown a disinclination to pay more for products that are more environmentally friendly."

The manufacturers have also been induced to go along because the White House is proposing a tax credit for appliance manufacturers who cooperate with these regulations. This washing machine mandate is a good example of the anti-free-market, high-tax regime that would be imposed by the Gore environmentalists who truly believe that government knows best, even about such things as how to wash our clothes.

At this late date in the congressional session, the only practical step citizens can take is to demand that Congress append an amendment to any piece of must-go legislation to order DOE to extend the public comment time until those of us who actually use washing machines have time to register our objections. Call your Members of Congress today.