

US lightbulb rules spark new political fight

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Visitors to Times Square walk past a lightbulb sign in the entry way to the Times Square Visitor Center. With a January deadline looming on a US law mandating energy efficiency standards for lightbulbs, more than a dozen Republican lawmakers are backing efforts to repeal the 2007 law

With a January deadline looming on a US law mandating energy efficiency standards for lightbulbs, some political forces don't want to turn out the lights.

More than a dozen Republican lawmakers are backing efforts to repeal the 2007 law that requires bulbs to consume less energy. Meanwhile Texas has enacted a law that would exempt itself from the federal requirement, and other states are debating similar legislation.

Some consumers have also begun hoarding the old incandescent bulbs based on an erroneous fear that these will be banned starting January 1

and consumers will be forced to buy compact fluorescent or other new types of bulbs.

The US law does not ban incandescent bulbs, but creates new standards for them, basically requiring increased efficiency, so that the bulbs with a lighting equivalent of 100 watts consume just 72 watts.

Still, repeal backers including at least two Republican presidential candidates argue the law is an intrusion on Americans' freedom of choice. Activists have launched petition drives calling the rules an example of a "nanny" state.

"The government has no business telling an individual what kind of [light bulb](#) to buy," said Representative Michele Bachmann, who is running for president, in introducing her "Light Bulb Freedom of Choice Act" earlier this year.

And she told a party gathering in June: "President Bachmann will allow you to buy any light bulb you want in the United States of America."

A separate bill has been introduced by Representative Joe Barton, joined by 14 other congressmen including Ron Paul, another presidential contender.

Barton said the 2007 law has resulted in "Washington-mandated [layoffs](#) in the middle of a desperate [recession](#)" and added "Washington is making too many decisions that are better left to people who work for their own paychecks and earn their own living."

A similar bill has been introduced in the Senate by Republicans Jim DeMint of South Carolina and Mike Enzi of Wyoming.



File picture shows workers preparing the 180 halogen lamps and 144 Xenon glitter strobes on the 500 pound Times Square New Year ball. With a January deadline looming on a US law mandating energy efficiency standards for lightbulbs, more than a dozen Republican lawmakers are backing efforts to repeal the 2007 law

Barton and others argue that the new law -- which was signed by Republican president George W. Bush -- would force consumers to switch to compact fluorescent lights (CFLs), most of which are not made in the United States.

Additionally, critics of the law claim CFLs contain toxic mercury, cannot be dimmed, and produce an inferior light.

A survey of US consumers by the lighting firm Osram Sylvania showed 28 percent were worried about the demise of the traditional bulb and 13 percent may start hoarding 100-watt bulbs.

But the survey also showed 59 percent of respondents "eager to use more energy efficient lighting solutions," the company said.

Industry representatives say there are public misconceptions about the law, including the notion of a ban on incandescents.

"Consumers need to know they will still have incandescent bulbs, they don't need to hoard bulbs," said Kyle Pitsor, vice president of the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, which represents lighting producers.

"The new incandescent bulbs will save them money and they will have more choices than ever before."



File picture shows halogen inserts designed for new technology light bulbs. With a January deadline looming on a US law mandating energy efficiency standards for lightbulbs, more than a dozen Republican lawmakers are backing efforts to repeal the 2007 law

In Texas, Governor Rick Perry on June 17 signed a bill that exempts the state from the federal [law](#), as long as incandescent light bulbs are manufactured and sold within the state.

Similar legislation is pending in South Carolina and Pennsylvania. In Arizona, a bill passed by the legislature was vetoed by Governor Jan Brewer, who said it could not be implemented because within the state there are no mining or processing plants for tungsten, which is needed for [incandescent bulbs](#).

Industry representatives contend the state laws may be counterproductive, adding it was unlikely that a manufacturer would establish a plant just for one state.

Kim Freeman of GE Appliances & Lighting said the various state efforts could lead to "a patchwork of inconsistent standards across the nation that would mean increased manufacturing and distribution costs, higher prices for consumers and lost sales for retailers."

Larry Lauk, spokesman for the American Lighting Association, said any new legislation may not change what manufacturers are doing in creating more efficient bulbs that use halogen, [LED](#) or other new technology.

"Manufacturers have already moved down the road," he said.

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