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## House GOP fails to turn off light bulb standards

By JIM ABRAMS  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) -- House Republicans on Tuesday failed to stop the enactment of new energy-saving standards for light bulbs they portrayed as yet another example of big government interfering in people's lives.

The GOP bill to overturn the standards set to go into effect next year fell short of the two-thirds majority needed for passage. The vote was 233-193.

For many Republicans, those newfangled curly fluorescent light bulbs were the last straw, pushed by an overreaching government that's forcing people to buy health insurance, prodding them to get more fuel-efficient cars and sticking its nose into too many places.

Their legislation would have kept the marketplace clear for the cheap, energy-wasting bulbs that have changed little since Thomas Edison invented them in 1879.

For most Democrats, it's an exasperating debate that, just like the old incandescent bulbs being crowded out of the market, produces more heat than light.

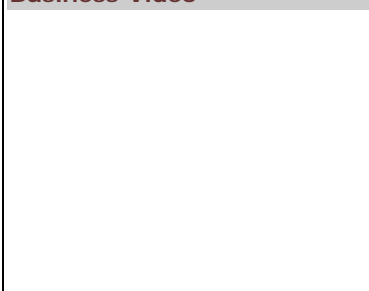
The standards in question do not specifically ban the old bulbs but require a higher level of efficiency than the classics can produce, essentially nudging them off store shelves over the next few years. Four of Edison's descendants said the great inventor would be mortified to see politicians trying to get the nation to hang on to an outdated technology when better bulbs are available.

The standards have not



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been particularly contentious before now. They were crafted in 2007 with Republican participation and signed into law by President George W. Bush. People seem to like the new choices and the energy savings they bring, polling finds.



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But now they have become a symbol of a much larger divide in Washington over the size and reach of government itself. The new bulbs suggest to some conservatives that big government is running amok.

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"Now the government wants to tell consumers what type of light bulb they use to read, cook, watch television or light their garage," said Rep. Michael Burgess, R-Texas.

"I'm not opposed to the squiggly tailed CFLs," said Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, a driving force behind the effort to save the old incandescents and the sponsor of the bill to overturn the standards. But making the old bulbs go away "seems to me to be overkill by the federal government."

Republicans said people who now buy a bulb for 30 or 40 cents shouldn't be forced to pay \$6 for a fluorescent bulb or more for LED (light-emitting diode) lighting.

"If you are Al Gore and want to spend \$10 for a light bulb, more power to you," Barton said. He exaggerated the cost of most energy-efficient bulbs and neglected to mention that they last years longer than old incandescent bulbs, which convert about 90 percent of the energy they consume as electricity into heat, and only 10 percent into light.

Republican presidential contender Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota complained earlier this year that, under President Barack Obama, "we bought a bureaucracy that now tells us which light bulbs to buy."

The Obama administration, which opposes Barton's bill, says the lighting standards that are being phased in will save nearly \$6 billion in 2015 alone. The Energy Department says upgrading 15 inefficient incandescent bulbs in a home could save a homeowner \$50 a year. Lighting accounts for about 10 percent of home electricity use.

The White House says the standards drive U.S. innovation, create manufacturing jobs and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

Incandescent bulbs are not disappearing. Today's energy-savings choices include incandescent lighting that is more efficient, and more expensive to purchase, than the old standbys.

Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., held up a new Sylvania incandescent that meets the efficiency standards and costs \$1.69. "You don't have to buy one of those funny-looking new light bulbs," he said.

Under existing rules, new bulbs will have to be 25 to 30 percent more efficient than traditional incandescent models. As of Jan. 1, 2012, inefficient 100-watt bulbs will no longer be available at most stores. Also on the way out are traditional 75-watt bulbs in 2013 and 40-watt and 60-watt versions in 2014.

The National Resources Defense Council said that when the law is fully implemented in 2020, energy costs will be reduced by 7 percent or about \$85 a household every year. It said the more efficient bulbs will eliminate the need for 33 large power plants.

The advocacy group presented statements from Edison's kin in support of the new standards. "Edison would certainly have recognized that the wave of the future - profits - is to make it better, cheaper and, yes, cleaner and more efficient," said Barry Edison Sloane, a great-grandson.

Said Robert Wheeler, a great-nephew: "The technology changes. Embrace it."

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