



If our government does not protect us from ourselves, who will?

James H Shott March 19, 2013

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg literally believes he is his brother's keeper, and in fact the keeper of all the millions of New Yorkers and visitors to the city. He was thus compelled to ban the sale by restaurants and other venues of sugary drinks in doses larger than 16 ounces, citing an ethical mandate for someone to do something to protect people from themselves.

Such feelings are at the root of boundless dictates from governments at all levels, and are frequently the product of folks who believe not only that they know better than we do what is best for us, but also feel led to control our behavior for our own good.

However, New Yorkers may rest marginally easier now that a state Supreme Court judge has properly ruled that the Bloomberg Ban is "arbitrary and capricious," and is now null and void.

This penchant among the nation's nannies produces varying degrees of damage. Some actions, like the Bloomberg Ban, are relatively harmless, merely restricting the personal liberty our Founders provided for us to pursue happiness.

Others, like the ban on Edison's incandescent light bulbs that have served us economically and dependably for well more than a century, have more serious effects. The newly mandated compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are said to use less energy and last longer than their predecessors, but are far more expensive, do not fit in many fixtures that incandescent bulbs do, and contain mercury, a substance that in emissions from coal burning electricity plants is viewed with great alarm by environmentalists, but is just peachy in CFLs. If you are unfortunate enough to break one of these bulbs, you must declare a minor hazmat emergency and execute a rigorous, time consuming and inconvenient cleanup routine. None of this is deemed nearly as important as the minuscule reduction in electricity use that CFLs provide, however.

Hyped-up environmental fears have spawned legions of regulations and initiatives, among which is the development of green cars that either run on electricity, or hybrids that alternate between conventional gasoline power and electricity. At the heart of this movement is concern over those dastardly carbon emissions produced by burning gasoline and diesel fuel. Electric cars emit no carbon dioxide and hybrids only do so when operating in gasoline mode.

We are told that if we do not take dramatic action immediately to reduce carbon emissions, the world will heat up and it will be even worse than the sequester. But the degree to which the activities of humans affect the world's temperature is a subject of (excuse the term) hot debate among scientists, and the evidence thus far — when all the fraudulent and contrived data is omitted — fails to support the doomsday prediction.

Nevertheless, President Barack Obama thought this was important enough to set a goal of having 1 million green cars on the road by 2015. But like CFLs, green cars are not consumer friendly, and sales in 2012 totaled a mere 50,000, well below what is needed to achieve Mr. Obama's goal. Consumers do not trust the immature technology and do not like their higher sticker prices.

Worse, you aren't told that environmental benefits are far less than we've been led to expect. A report by the National Center for Policy Analysis discusses the problems, noting that while electric cars do not contribute to "global warming," that is true only in the sense that they do not emit carbon dioxide. Building an electric car produces more than twice as much carbon-dioxide as building a conventional car, and because electric vehicles use electricity typically produced with fossil fuels, it indirectly emits about six ounces of carbon dioxide per mile compared with 12 ounces for a conventional car. Buying a green car that costs a lot more, uses an untrusted technology and contributes very little to environmental improvement holds little appeal for most people.

A Cato Institute report quoted former president Ronald Reagan: "Government exists to protect us from each other. Where government has gone beyond its limits is in deciding to protect us from ourselves," and then suggested that "today's policymakers would do well to heed Reagan's words," noting that "Lawmakers at all levels of government have shown increasing contempt for personal responsibility and an increasing tendency to employ the power of the state to influence behavior. Government today pressures us to avoid risks, even risks that many of us knowingly and willingly take. There seems to be a consensus among nanny-statists that, with enough public service announcements, awareness campaigns, and social engineering efforts, Americans will start behaving as the nanny-statists want them to."

Yet, the nannies in both the public and private sectors ignore evidence that Americans prefer to think for themselves, enjoy the personal liberty we were given, and pursue happiness as we decide to, even if there is some risk attached to it.

Don't lie to us about the condition of the environment to gain control or force foolish changes to how we live, or force us to eat better or act differently for our own good. Just go away and leave us alone.

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