

Business

House Votes to Save Traditional Incandescent Bulb for 2012

Jim Snyder

July 15, 2011, 2:40 PM EDT

The U.S. House approved a provision to save for a year the 100-watt incandescent light bulb, which has become a pear-shaped symbol of personal freedom to some Republicans.

Lawmakers passed on a voice vote an amendment to energy-spending legislation for fiscal year 2012 barring the Energy Department from implementing or enforcing lighting-efficiency standards set by 2007 legislation. The law would effectively push the traditional bulbs off store shelves, starting with the 100-watt version next year.

Republicans passed the amendment over objections from Democrats, environmental groups and lighting manufacturers such as Fairfield, Connecticut-based General Electric Co., which have retooled factories and products to meet the new standards. Critics said consumers should be able to buy the cheapest bulbs on the market.

“The federal government has no right to tell me or any other citizen what type of light bulb to use at home,” said Representative Michael Burgess, a Texas

Republican who sponsored the amendment, during debate yesterday. “It is our right to choose.”

President Barack Obama’s administration has said the light-bulb standards will save consumers \$6 billion in 2015.

Democrats rejected Republicans’ complaints that the bulb standards would restrict choice, saying companies already produce more than one type of lighting that would comply with the law, including a more efficient and more expensive incandescent.

Spending Measure

The House passed the spending bill that includes the light-bulb amendment by a 219-196 vote, with 10 Democrats joining the majority and 21 Republicans opposing the measure.

The legislation provides \$30.6 billion in funding for energy- and water-related programs, about \$5.9 billion less than the amount requested by President Barack Obama, and about \$1 billion less than the programs received for fiscal 2011.

Efforts by Democrats to add millions of dollars to energy-efficiency and renewable-energy programs were rejected by Republicans during debate on the measure. The Appropriations Committee had cut \$1.9 billion from the Administration’s \$3.2 billion request.

The bill adds \$45 million to pay for a waste-repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, which the administration is seeking to shut down.

Second Bulb Vote

Today's vote on light bulbs was the second this week. The House on July 13 rejected by a 233-193 vote a bill that would have repealed the higher efficiency standards. The measure was brought up under a procedure that required two-thirds support to pass.

While the 2007 law passed with bipartisan support and was signed by President George W. Bush, Republicans have cited it this year as an example of an intrusive federal government. Critics also said the mercury contained in one type of replacement, the compact fluorescent lights, raise health and environmental concerns.

Recycling Bulbs

Environmental groups said the trace amount of the toxin in the bulbs isn't a problem when they are recycled properly, and that the standards will eventually save the amount of energy that would otherwise be produced by more than 30 power plants.

Kateri Callahan, president of the Alliance to Save Energy, a Washington-based energy-efficiency advocacy group, said in a statement yesterday that preventing the Energy Department from enforcing the light-bulb law "may cost consumers little up front, but would put a strain on their wallets in the long term."

The National Electrical Manufacturers Association, which includes Fairfield, Connecticut-based General Electric Co., said in a letter to Congress that the bill would "strand millions of dollars in investment," create "regulatory uncertainty," and increase energy use in the U.S.

The spending bill is H.R. 2354.

(Updates with vote on energy spending bill in seventh paragraph.)

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