

Just wondering

December 25, 2013

By Allen R. Sanderson



If compact fluorescent light bulbs are so wonderful and cost-saving, then one would think they would, in ubiquitous marketing jargon, "fly off the shelves" and into shoppers' carts. (Justin Sullivan, Getty photo 2007 / December 25, 2013)

Compact fluorescent light bulbs reduce energy use by perhaps 75 percent and last 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs, though admittedly they have significantly higher initial purchase prices and some back-end disposal problems because of mercury content. But if they are so wonderful and cost-saving, then one would think they would, in ubiquitous marketing jargon, "fly off the shelves" and into shoppers' carts. Why, then, would the government even have to ban the manufacture and sale of arguably inferior Edison-like 60- and 40-watt incandescent products, which it will do starting Jan. 1?

Wouldn't well-informed consumers abandon the old bulbs on their own?

- If a firm — say Wal-Mart or McDonald's — would really be better off (meaning more profits for its stockholders or individual franchise owners) paying its workers higher wages to get a more attractive, productive workforce and happier customers, wouldn't it do this on its own without having to confront Fight for 15 protests and condescending lectures coming from some academic quarters? Why wouldn't this you're-leaving-money-on-the-table opportunity occur to firms on their own? In fact, if this is the case more generally, why have a specified, legal minimum wage at all?

- If fast-food restaurants are required by law to post the calorie content of their menu items, why are local eateries and bakeries exempt? Because they're bad at math, or is this largely because of an anti-corporate bias and the political clout of the shops around the corner?

- If we "Buy American," that is, go out of our way to ensure that the goods we purchase are made right here in the USA, doesn't that mean that other countries will then have less money to spend on our products? And if we go with Buy American programs and China goes with a Buy Chinese equivalent, and the European Union encourages trade only within Europe, what are the implications and likely outcomes for the U.S. economy?

- Locavores want us to shop and buy local. So let's do it. And in a sauce-for-gander-and-geese scenario, shouldn't it be incumbent upon those local mom-and-pop establishments to sell only locally; no more shipping their goods to Iowa or selling to outsiders — and while we're at it, let's just ban tourists. Both activists and patriots should think this through while sipping their lattes.

- According to the AARP (formally the American Association of Retired Persons, but less formerly the American Association of Rich People Who Have Learned How to Extort Benefits from Younger Taxpayers), for every dollar of Social Security benefits paid out, we get almost \$2 in spending in the economy. Thus, shouldn't we in these hard times double Social Security payments to stimulate the economy and reduce unemployment? Or has the shuffleboard-and-leisure-suit set overlooked the inconvenient aspect that every dollar taxpayers would otherwise have in their pockets now reduces about \$2 of their spending elsewhere?

- Two tickets matched all numbers to split the \$648 million Mega Millions prize. Good for the winners. And newspapers, radio stations and television networks will have segments on the winners. But for someone to win, say, \$1 million in a lottery, that has to mean that maybe 500,000 people bought losing tickets and are out about \$2 million. Shouldn't we require this government-sponsored redistribution devote something akin to equal time to features on the losers?

- Mayor Rahm Emanuel and police Superintendent Garry McCarthy have lobbied hard for legislation that would require a mandatory prison sentence for anyone convicted of illegal use of a weapon. Fair enough. But arguably the most preventable cause of death at our disposal is driving under the influence. Why not put equal muscle behind a proposal that would impose a mandatory — and immediate — prison term for anyone failing a Breathalyzer test? Those electronic "Don't Drink and Drive" expressway messages should not just be a courteous reminder but a stern warning. Just wondering.

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