

Tanning bill is a government overreach

By Wayne Hoffman

If Little Sally draws a picture of Stick Child, Stick Mommy and Stick Daddy under a Crayola Unmellow Yellow sun, will teachers be instructed to probe for more information, to make sure that the family wore SPF 30?

Increasingly, the government assumes that parents aren't smart enough to make proper decisions for their children. The government increasingly assumes the role of parent and, increasingly, that role is accepted as normal. It's not.

An interesting nanny government occurrence took place in North Carolina last month. A pre-school kid, who brought a bag lunch to school, wound up eating a meal of chicken nuggets after a government inspector decided that her homemade refreshments were insufficient by government standards.

The 4-year-old brought a turkey and cheese sandwich, a banana, potato chips and apple juice, but the inspector checking meals at the school that day said the lunch didn't measure up to government standards, resulting in the child ditching her homemade lunch in favor of the school-prepared, government-authorized nuggets.

Meanwhile, in Idaho, state lawmakers are debating a bill that would ban minors from using tanning beds. On Thursday, the House Health and Welfare Committee heard from a steady stream of dermatologists, school teachers and other do-gooders who believe the government should ban youngsters from using a tanning bed.

The bill would make the minor and the operator of the tanning bed subject to a misdemeanor and a \$500 fine. Additional violations add a \$1,000 fine. The bill doesn't say who would enforce the law, and it makes no distinction for commercial tanning beds or those that are in a person's home. The government would have authority over both, which leads to other interesting questions about enforcement: If a normally pasty kid shows up at school a shade darker than normal, will schoolteachers and counselors press the child for additional information? Will police get a warrant to see if a contraband tanning bed is in the family's basement?

The government inspectors who examine school lunches in North Carolina have something in common with the people who want to keep kids out of tanning beds in Idaho: They both want to do some good and they both lack faith in parents to provide that good. Both believe the government has to intervene.

But then what? In North Carolina, will government authorities question kids about what they had to eat the night before? And then investigate those parents who failed to offer what the government deems a well-balanced meal?

And for Idaho, assuming the tanning bed requirement passes, what comes next? If kids spend too much time outside, exposed to the sun, might that be considered a crime? Would a child's sunburn lead to police investigation? Might police or other government

agents order children back into their homes after they've exceeded daily sun exposure limits?

During the hearing on tanning beds, one teacher of schoolchildren said, "In their minds, if something is legal, it is safe." And since the state government hasn't banned it, tanning beds have the government's seal of approval.

Government intervention in our daily activities instills in our kids that only government has the capacity to decide right and wrong. That the government knows best. That the government's judgment is superior to that of ordinary citizens. In the near term, we'll save our children from the harm that might be caused by tanning beds and improperly packed school lunches.

But the damage done to freedom will be longer lasting.