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## **The Slippery Slope of Nanny-State Politics**

**by Jeffrey A. Singer**

On December 5, 2006, the City of New York banned the use of trans fats in restaurants and food preparation. Ironically, many of the experts proclaiming the dangers of trans fats were the ones who urged us to embrace them as “heart-healthy” in the 1980s. William Willett, chairman of the department of nutrition at Harvard University, who was one of the early advocates of trans fats, admitted this in a 2005 *New York Times* report.

First our government “protectors” take away the rights of property owners to decide whether they will allow guests to smoke in their restaurants and other private business establishments. Now, before the smoke has even had a chance to clear, our “parents” are turning their attention to what we choose to eat. Soon there will be no activity that “free” American adults can engage in that will not require the prior approval of nanny-state bureaucrats.

By now it is obvious to most people that “advocacy” or “junk” science infects much of the information reported about the harmful effects of many things we do. Whether it’s global warming, silicone breast implants, second-hand smoke, or the types and amounts of fats we ingest, the fact remains that much of the data is inconclusive. But that doesn’t stop those with an agenda from micro-managing the daily lives of their fellow citizens.

Remember the alar scare of the 1980s? Remember cyclamates? Those, among many other panic attacks of the regulatory class, have long since been discredited. We laugh now at how we overreacted to those scares. But the overreaction proved a costly blow to the industries affected — and an unnecessary inconvenience to those of us who were daredevils and were willing to take our chances ingesting such products.

Should we prohibit working as a convenience-store clerk at night? Or perhaps no one should be allowed to be a firefighter. After all, these jobs are definitely more dangerous than bartending in a smoke-filled lounge.

So now, from the people who would have you believe that second-hand smoke is worse than *actual* smoking, comes the war on trans fats. What will be the next project of the advocacy-science crowd? Banning cell phones because of the risk of brain cancer? Banning vaccinations of

children because of the risk of autism? Banning genetically modified food? There is always some scientific “data” to justify any such action — not necessarily credible data, but that hasn’t stopped anyone so far.

There is something more important than the integrity of scientific research that is at stake here. In a free society, people should be able to make their own choices regarding how much risk they are willing to take when engaging in any activity. Independent organizations should be free to make information available to the public regarding risks and benefits — but they must not be allowed to make the decisions for the people.

Each individual is unique. One person may judge the risk/benefit ratio of a particular behavior to be more favorable than may another person. And they both may be right — for themselves, as individuals. In a free society, people decide what risks they are willing to take — so long as they do not infringe on the rights of others. And in a free society, people accept the consequences of the bad choices they make.

“Freedom” doesn’t mean you get to vote on who is to be your master. Freedom means you are your own master. Freedom means autonomy and personal responsibility.

The “free” nations of the West continue down the slippery slope to tyranny. Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz referred to it as “the therapeutic state.” Others call it the “nanny state.” Whatever name we give it, the fact remains that people are not free when their choices are proscribed by committees of busybodies, even well-intentioned ones, who are, after all, no more omniscient than the people they choose to control.

While our leaders sound the alarm about international terrorism that threatens “our very way of life,” a more stealthy threat to our way of life continues to eat at our society from within. We must tell these dangerous busybodies to mind their own business — before it’s too late.

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