Yet again, House Republicans have passed a ban on enforcing efficiency regulations for light bulbs, taking a brave stance in favor of energy wastage. The amendment bans DOE from spending any money to enforce the restrictions. They've done this repeatedly, for reasons that seem to have more to do with talk radio than with any actual policy objections. What makes this round a little more interesting is the stance of the amendment's sponsor, Michael Burgess, whose district is just north of Dallas. Like the football hero of *North Dallas Forty*, he's a bit of an iconoclast. On the one hand, Burgess happily spouts the Tea Party line about the DOE regulations. On the other hand, he actually does seem to support energy efficiency.Departures from the party line can be dangerous in today's Republican party (and not always safe on the Democratic side). It's refreshing to see a member of the House majority who doesn't simply download his views from Fox News.

I'll begin with what he says about the amendment:

"With the extreme expansion of federal powers undertaken by the Obama administration and congressional Democrats, Americans have realized just how far the Constitution's commerce clause has been manipulated from its original intent," Burgess said. "The light bulb mandate is the perfect example of this. The founding fathers never intended the commerce clause to be used to allow the federal government to regulate and pass mandates on consumer products that do not pose a threat to either human health or safety."

This is fairly standard Tea Party fare. It papers over the fact that the regulation is a product of a statute signed by George W. Bush, having nothing to do with Obama. It also misapprehends constitutional law. It's been clear for at least a century, since the Supreme Court upheld a ban on interstate transportation of lottery tickets, that Congress can regulate or ban products that are not physically harmful.

Although his statement about the light bulb regulations sounds like knee-jerk ideology, there's a more interesting side to Burgess. I also found this flyer on his website:



You wouldn't expect the average Tea Party zealot to advertise sharing a platform with an EPA regional administrator. This isn't a fluke. His website endorses fracking and drilling in ANWR and offshore — as you'd expect from any Republican, let alone one from Texas — but it also has this to say:

Alternative energy sources will be an important source of power in the future, and Texas' 26th Congressional District has been a leader in alternative energy – from a company that manufactures solar panels in Keller and another that manufactures wind turbine blades in Gainesville. Biogas created at the City of Denton Landfill powers a biodiesel manufacturing facility. The Lake Dallas Independent School District uses geothermal energy to heat and cool their schools. Peterbilt Motors Company, a leader in creating energy-efficient trucks, is headquartered in Denton. I believe that the expansion of the EnergyStar program and hybrid and alternative fueled vehicle provisions play an important role in domestic energy security and in cleaning our environment. I drive a hybrid vehicle myself, and have taken several steps to make my home more energy-efficient.

In addition, Burgess doesn't seem to be reflexively anti-regulatory. His website supports more vigorous regulation of food safety:

I am concerned that the current entities that deal with food and product safety do not have the resources and structural organization to protect consumers from these dangers. Also at issue is whether federal food safety laws, first enacted in the early 1900s, have kept pace with the significant changes that have occurred in the food production, processing, and marketing sectors.

Further afield, he also sponsored a bill to expand Medicare coverage for kidney transplant patients, which doesn't seem like a very Tea Party move. Yet he's also a staunch conservative on many issues.

Burgess has an unusual combination of views, perhaps reflecting the mix of his district. Even in today's highly polarized politics, it's good to be reminded that policy views aren't always completely predictable.

[Note: an error in the title has been corrected.]