

THE LEAD RUBBER DUCKY IN GROVER'S BATHTUB

There's an interesting case study going on over at the Senate Commerce Committee. The Committee is trying to write legislation to return the Consumer Product Safety Commission to its former strength so it can prevent things like lead-filled toys from entering the toddler chew chain. Yet the Commission's acting head, Nancy Nord, is trying to preserve the Norquistian "ideal" of small government—she's objecting to Senate plans to give her Commission more money and other resources.

The nation's top official for consumer product safety has asked Congress in recent days to reject legislation intended to strengthen the agency, which polices thousands of consumer goods, from toys to tools.

On the eve of an important Senate committee meeting to consider the legislation, Nancy A. Nord, the acting chairwoman of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, has asked lawmakers in two letters not to approve the bulk of legislation that would increase the agency's authority, double its budget and sharply increase its dwindling staff.

Ms. Nord opposes provisions that would increase the maximum penalties for safety violations and make it easier for the government to make public reports of faulty products, protect industry whistle-blowers and prosecute executives of companies that willfully violate laws.

I'm sure it will surprise no one reading that Nord was not chosen for a life-long affiliation

with consumer interests?

Ms. Nord, who before joining the agency had been a lawyer at Eastman Kodak and an official at the United States Chamber of Commerce,

The Administration is also having Allen Hubbard write a letter to express concern, no doubt, that if Mattel has to stop selling toys with lead, the entire economy will collapse. As if it weren't collapsing on Greenspan's ARM bubble already.

It'll be an interesting fight. Average Americans find it hard to mobilize to do things like oppose war. But many otherwise apathetic Americans will mobilize when you tell them—as Nord has—that it's "not practical" to remove all the lead from the toys their kids are playing with.

The recent spate of food and product problems provide easy proof that Grover Norquist's drowning government doesn't work. It'll be interesting to see how consumers respond if they learn that the woman their taxes pay to keep their kids safe refuses to do her job.