



Wingnut Enforcer Grover
Norquist

I hope I'm wrong. [Jon Chait reports that](#) Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) will force a cloture vote on his proposal to eliminate the ethanol "blending" subsidy, which costs the government about \$6 billion annually, is horrible for the environment, and is economically inefficient. His take is that this represents an ideological skirmish between Coburn and Wingnut Enforcer Grover Norquist, who forces GOP officeholders to sign a "no-tax" pledge that includes banning the elimination of tax credits. Norquist's position is ridiculous even on conservative grounds because it forces ostensibly pro-market Republicans to subsidize winners and losers. Thus, says Chait:

Coburn and a handful of Republicans are trying to get around [Norquist's] pledge. Their tactic is to negotiate revenue increases that take the form of closing loopholes and exemptions rather than raising rates. This would clearly violate the Pledge. But Coburn is trying to expose the silliness of the Pledge. He's holding a vote on eliminating the ethanol subsidy. Now, conservatives oppose the ethanol subsidy. But since the subsidy is a tax credit, then eliminating it is a tax increase, and forbidden by the Pledge.

So Coburn's goal here is to drive a wedge between conservative doctrine and Norquist's anti-tax dogma. If Norquist opposes a vote against ethanol, he reveals how absurd his pledge actually is. If he supports it, then he proves that it shouldn't be taken literally.

Chait calls this an “ethanol trap,” but I’m somewhat mystified about what the trap is. Republicans aren’t worried about voting for absurdities. They still believe that tax cuts pay for themselves, that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, that climate

"My goal is to cut government in half in twenty-five years, to get it down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub."

— Grover Norquist: 'Field Marshal' of the Bush Plan



But Ethanol Subsidies Are Fine

change is a liberal hoax, that war is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength. Tim Pawlenty released an economic “plan” the other day that rests upon the proposition that American GDP can grow at 5% for more than a decade. Congressional Republicans are prepared to let the nation go into default and crash the world economy if they don’t get to chop Medicare to bits. Chait claims that conservatives hate the ethanol subsidy, but that applies mostly to conservative intellectuals in think tanks. Republicans love government spending as long as it benefits the wealthy: when plutocracy runs up against the free market, plutocracy wins.

I predict that most Republicans will vote to maintain the subsidy, and with the support of farm state Democrats, will block cloture. The press will not notice the absurdity because it is focused on world-historical events such as what Anthony Weiner tweeted last week. What’s the trap here?