



As readers of this page

know, I am extremely fair and balanced: I criticize each party if it does something wrong, and praise each if it does something right. If one of those parties happens to do wrong things close to all the time, well, that's not my fault.

But let us now praise a [Worthwhile Republican Initiative](#):

A new Republican bill introduced Tuesday would completely repeal the federal mandate to blend ethanol into the nation's gasoline supply.

Sen. Bill Cassidy's (R-La.) legislation would completely do away with the renewable fuel standard, which first took effect in 2005 and now requires increasing levels of ethanol and biodiesel to be put into traditional fossil fuels.

A good chunk of this article is spin: it says that "[t]he mandate invites frequent criticism from Republicans, the oil industry and sectors that complain the demand it creates for corn ethanol increases agricultural prices." This is true, but only half-true: it attracts just-as-frequent criticism from Democrats, who complain that it represents a special interest payoff that does nothing for energy independence and harms the environment.



Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.): Tilting at Windmills?

And make no mistake: the ethanol mandate is terrible policy on just about every level. Despite calling it “renewable,” just about every credible life-cycle analysis I have seen shows that the amount of energy required to produce ethanol makes it highly inefficient — and of course since it requires so much energy to produce, it hardly reduces emissions, either. Basically, ethanol isn’t a renewable energy source at all — it is an agricultural subsidy masquerading as a renewable energy source.

Therein lies the rub: agricultural subsidies are the sorts of things that progressive and conservative intellectuals can agree make no sense and harm both America and the world, and it doesn’t make one whit because the interests that defend them are so powerful. That’s why, for example, the United States instituted the mohair subsidy in 1955 because heavy wool clothing helped soldiers fighting the Nazis in Germany — [and didn’t get rid of it until 1993](#).

So good luck to Cassidy and his bill — he’s going to need it. As befits a representative of oil-rich Louisiana, he has targeted ethanol subsidies for years — his [Ethanol Subsidy Repeal Act in 2011-12 received strong bipartisan support](#). And as befits the Congressional process, it didn’t even get a hearing.