Last month, when discussing the egregious subsidies for ethanol that expire this year, I commented, "Here is a great test to see whether Republican anti-government and anti-spending rhetoric is any more than that."

Well, so much for that:

> Renewable Fuels Association president Bob Dinneen says they are thrilled with passage of the Senate tax package that includes a one year extension of current ethanol tax incentives....
>
> Dinneen says the blender's tax credit has been vital to the growth of the ethanol industry.
>
> "It is the foundation upon which this industry was built. It allowed gasoline marketers to compete with their supplier but integrated oil company competitors for octane and volume in gasoline markets across the country. It has absolutely been the single most effective policy for ethanol that we've ever had."

Got that? The ethanol industry is completely dependent upon a government subsidy. As Mike O' Hare notes, public goods like parks, education, transit, the military, etc. should be subsidized. Ethanol, on the other hand, is pure special interest legislation: O'Hare notes that the tariff on Brazilian sugar cane ethanol, which "amy be genuinely green," gets no relief here.

And it points out the utter hypocrisy of Republican calls for cutting the budget: Dineen specifically lauded Iowa Republican Chuck Grassley for playing the key role in keeping the subsidies going. The GOP is only interested in cutting the budget if the beneficiaries are low-income (or 9/11 first responders). If they are relatively wealthy and powerful, as agribusiness is, then the Republicans are happy to help out. Democrats have hardly distinguished themselves in the ethanol fight — this is really more a regional issue than a partisan one — but at least they don't try to hack apart the safety net while leaving the wealthy untouched. And at least they base their environmental policies on science.

One day there will be actual constructive conservative policies in this country. We're not close to it now.