(UPDATED: See below).

I've had a good bit of fun jumping on the Republican Party for its hypocrisy on energy subsidies. So when a Republican does the right thing, it's important to acknowledge it:

> Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty made a potentially risky move during his campaign launch speech in Iowa: he called for a phaseout of ethanol subsidies.
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> "The hard truth is that there are no longer any sacred programs," said Pawlenty. "The truth about federal energy subsidies, including federal subsidies for ethanol, is that they have to be phased out. We need to do it gradually. We need to do it fairly. But we need to do it."

Good for T-Paw. Why would he do this? One could always argue that he is doing it because he believes in it, but allow me to express some skepticism. This is a candidate who set new lows in abject groveling for his flip-flop on climate change.

My initial take is that, with Mike Huckabee out of the race, Pawlenty knows that either Michele Bachmann or Sarah Palin is going to run, and if either or both of them runs, then the Iowa caucus, which is dominated by evangelicals, will go to either of them. So he figures he will take his lumps on it, but will enhance his nationwide reputation as a "tough, sober" leader. Given growing GOP anxiety over the poor quality of its Presidential candidates, this is a well-timed move. In other words, his intended audience here isn't Iowans: it is David Brooks and Charles Krauthammer and money people out east.

Question: Governor Pawlenty, were the Senate Republicans wrong to filibuster the Democratic phase-out of subsidies for the largest oil companies? Yes or no?

Note also that Pawlenty has an out here: corn is heavily subsidized, but not simply for energy purposes. It's a straightforward farm price support for a product that dominates much of American food. So a Pawlenty Administration could quite easily make a big deal out of ending "energy subsidies," and then give back to corn farmers what it has just taken away.

But I'm old enough that I don't judge proposals based upon what kind of a person a

politician is. I will very happily take the right policy for the wrong reason.

Oh, and by the way: Secretary (and former Iowa Governor) Vilsack, what's the administration's position on this? Hello?

UPDATE: See? I try to be fair and balanced, but Republicans just won't let me. Turns out that just a few weeks ago, Pawlenty said that cutting oil and gas subsidies would be "ludicrous." Is he a hypocrite, or does he just believe in socialism for the rich? I report, you decide.