In 1998, then-Congressman Henry Hyde famously tried to write off an extramarital affair at age 41 as “youthful indiscretion”. I am wondering if President Obama’s Commerce Secretary nominee John Bryson is tempted to use that phrase to explain his long-ago involvement in helping to create the Natural Resources Defense Council. Not that he has anything to apologize for.

In reacting to Bryson’s appointment, Representative Darrell Issa called him a dangerous “green evangelist,” as he joined Senator James Inhofe in pledging to oppose confirmation.

John Bryson has quite a resume for a green evangelist: Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Office of Edison International from 1990-2008; a director of the Boeing Company since 1995; Chairman of the Board of BrightSource Energy, member of the Board of Overseers of Keck School of Medicine at USC; a trustee of the California Institute of Technology; a director of the Western Asset Income Fund from 1986 to 2006: a Director of the Walt Disney Company since 2000. Prior to these activities, as a private attorney, he represented a major telecommunications firm.

Bryson has always recognized the role that corporate decision making has in environmental protection, yet he oversaw the operation of such industrial facilities as the Mohave Coal Plant in Nevada – famous for its degradation of air quality in the Grand Canyon and its depletion of a Navajo aquifer deep below Black Mesa. For many years, he led Edison’s Mission Energy Group that operates many fossil-fuel power plants in several states, including coal-fired plants in Illinois and Pennsylvania. Mission also boasts ownership of one of the largest portfolios of wind energy in the United States.

Prior to his corporate days, Bryson served in government as a member of the Oregon Public Utilities Commission and then as President of the California Public Utilities Commission. In those roles, he demonstrated creative leadership in diversifying the resource mix of electric utilities, and promoting energy efficiency, cogeneration, and integrated resource planning.

John Bryson’s record needs to be considered on its merits. Let’s hope that Issa’s silly characterization does not dominate the conversation. Based on time I spent working with him early in his public career, I can report that he is an exceptionally skilled, well-spoken, effective leader with both energy and vision. Question his individual decisions and actions all you want, but let’s just skip the labels.