



## **What Do Al Gore, Jim DeMint and Tom Coburn Have in Common?**

**By Joel Velasco**

U.S. ethanol policy has been known to create some of the strangest bedfellows, but today's news may take the cake. With just days left on the legislative calendar and ethanol's \$6 billion per year subsidies and trade protection at stake, leading conservative Senators Jim DeMint (R-SC) and Tom Coburn (R-OK) joined former Vice President Al Gore in denouncing the current policy with bold calls for reform.

The Washington Post's Greg Sargent reports that both Jim DeMint and Tom Coburn are urging fellow Republicans to allow the current policy to expire on December 31st as scheduled. Many have suggested that eliminating the \$6 billion dollar per year ethanol subsidy and tariff is Congress' first real test of fiscal responsibility since the wave mid-term election. It's now apparent that the issue is driving a wedge between the ranks of Republican leadership.

In a statement emailed to Sargent, DeMint wrote:

"Government mandates and tax subsidies for ethanol have led to decreased gas mileage, adversely effected the environment and increased food prices. Washington must stop picking winners and losers in the market, and instead allow Americans to make choices for themselves."

Sargent also interviewed Tom Coburn, who said "[w]e need to let the ethanol subsidies expire and we need energy developed based on market forces." Coburn added that those unwilling to let the subsidies expire were "just protecting a parochial interest ahead of the national interest."

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic at a green energy conference in Greece, Al Gore declared that subsidized support for corn-based ethanol was "not a good policy." He then renounced his previous support for the original program, candidly stating that "[o]ne of the reasons I made that mistake is that I paid particular attention to the farmers in my home state of Tennessee, and I had a certain fondness for the farmers in the state of Iowa because I was about to run for president."

And with that, the most unlikely of political stars were aligned on energy policy. The news comes hot off the heels of our Day of Action, where clean energy advocates sent more than 25,000 letters and emails to Congress calling for the end of ethanol subsidies and trade protection. We take this as an encouraging sign that the message is getting through. If cutting the deficit and ending wasteful government spending are top priorities for Congress, ethanol policy is the best place to start.

*Disclaimer: In the interest of full disclosure, I should note that I never once discussed ethanol issues with Vice President Al Gore when I worked for him from 1994 to 1997, nor anytime thereafter including during his presidential campaign. On the other hand, I did lend support in 2003 to Gen. Wesley Clark's presidential campaign, who ironically is now the Co-Chair of Growth Energy!*

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