

Did Ted Cruz Flip-Flop or Not?

Wednesday, U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) found himself once again defending himself from baseless attacks by an Iowa-based group with direct ties to Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad.

America's Renewable Future, a nonprofit operated by Branstad's son, Eric, has been critical throughout the current election cycle of Cruz for the senator's stance on ethanol and the Renewable Fuels Standard. The RFS is a federal regulation that requires specific amounts of renewable fuels be introduced to the marketplace each year.

Cruz, who introduced legislation in 2014 for a five-year phase-out of the RFS, has consistently made the argument that government shouldn't be "picking winners and losers." He made that argument during the Iowa Ag Summit last March, and in an interview with RFD-TV last September.

During recent campaign stops along his "Cruzin' to Caucus" tour of Iowa, Cruz was asked by an ethanol supporter whether or not he supports the RFS. His answer, while consistent with his previous statements, was then reported by ARF as a "change of heart" based on "listening to Iowa voters" on the issue.

"Farmers and rural communities across Iowa are going to be encouraged by Sen. Cruz's remarks," Eric Branstad said in an ARF press release. "He is clearly listening to the people of Iowa and understands the importance of the Renewable Fuel Standard to America's economy and energy independence, as he started the caucus process calling for immediate repeal. While not perfect, this is a big step forward by Sen. Cruz."

The statement that Cruz has supported an immediate repeal fails the honesty test, but so does the suggestion that he has somehow altered his views after pressure from ARF and ethanol

supporters in Iowa.

The Cruz camp responded with the following statement:

“Today, the Cruz campaign responded to the false claims from the ethanol lobby that presidential candidate Ted Cruz has shifted his position on the Renewable Fuel Standard mandate: Cruz has consistently supported a five-year phase-out of the Renewable Fuel Standard.

“Further, Cruz has always said government shouldn’t pick winners or losers, which means government shouldn’t be handing out subsidies or creating mandates to or for favored industries, but they also shouldn’t create barriers that prevent industries from having access to and expanding their markets.

“To that end, he would instruct the Justice Department to vigorously enforce antitrust laws and he would eliminate the EPA’s regulations that impose a hard wall against the general sale of mid-level ethanol blends, such as E25 (25 percent ethanol, 75 percent gasoline). This opens up entire new markets for ethanol. Indeed, his argument is that ethanol manufacturers would more likely be better off without government interference than with the mandates and regulations. Far from a ‘shift,’ this approach is consistent with Cruz’s free-market principles that encourage innovation and competition.”

Cruz isn’t the only GOP presidential candidate who opposes the RFS. U.S. Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) also receives a failing grade from ARF on the issue. According to financial disclosures to the Federal Election Commission, the organization is launching a direct-mail and digital advertising campaign against both candidates.

The ad campaign is likely tied to ARF’s “candidate report card,” which it has released on its website. The “report card” only hands out “good” and “bad” ratings, relative to support

for the RFS:

"The report card places each presidential contender into a good or bad category based on their support for the federal Renewable Fuel Standard," the ARF press release regarding the report card states. "ARF will use the report card to let more than 50,000 pledged caucus-goers and Iowans know which candidates will protect the state's economy or which will be job killers. The tactics used will be a combination of grass-roots and paid efforts."

Although Cruz and Paul both received "bad" ratings on the report card, ARF has focused its attention on the former, who currently leads in the polls ahead of Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucus. Those efforts included radio advertisements that have painted him as hypocritical for supporting oil subsidies but not the RFS—which were later also proven to be false.

Regardless, ARF has continued to hound Cruz throughout Iowa with its network of 17 field staffers who cover all 99 counties of the state. There is a danger that message could impact Cruz' chances in Iowa: 61 percent of likely Republican caucus voters (it climbs to 76 percent among Democrats) say they support the RFS.

"Ted Cruz is dangerous to Iowa and thousands of Iowa jobs," Eric Branstad said. "Our economy depends on a strong RFS and Iowans count on \$5 billion in wages, thanks to it. Ted Cruz wants to kill their jobs, and we are going to make sure every Iowan knows that."

Although his father has not officially endorsed a candidate, it is well-known across the state that he has very close ties with the Chris Christie campaign, and he, too, has been heavily critical of Cruz' stance on the RFS. But another Hawkeye State kingmaker, who also happens to be a big supporter of ethanol, has not only endorsed the senator, but

taken on a key role in his campaign.

U.S. Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), a seven-term congressman from northwestern Iowa, was named the Cruz campaign's national co-chair on Wednesday. He has been traveling around the state as part of the "Cruzín' to Caucus" tour all week.

"Ted Cruz has been a consistent and tireless fighter on the issues that matter most to conservatives, such as Obamacare, religious liberty, life and stopping Obama's lawless executive actions," King said. "He is the full-spectrum constitutional conservative in the race. We need someone who does what they say they're going to do in the White House in order to get this country back on track. This election is a critical one for conservatives. We need to come together to elect a strong, principled leader to win the White House in 2016."