

Establishment Politician Grinds His Gears Over Ted Cruz

Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad has said repeatedly he won't endorse a candidate for president ahead of next month's first-in-the-nation Republican caucuses.

But that doesn't mean he hasn't picked sides. Especially when it comes to one of the front-runners in the race, U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas). Tuesday, he told reporters exactly what he thinks of the candidate and his position on renewable fuels, which have become a key piece of the state's economy over the past 20 years.

"We're trying to educate the people of Iowa he is the biggest opponent of renewable fuels, and he actually introduced a bill in 2013 to immediately eliminate the Renewable Fuels Standard," Branstad told reporters at the Iowa Renewable Fuels Summit in Des Moines. "He is heavily financed by Big Oil."

Cruz wasn't invited to the event, which is heavily influenced by America's Renewable Future, a political nonprofit run by Branstad's son, Eric. The governor said the senator's proposals to do away with subsidies for renewable fuels, such as ethanol and biodiesel, will make him less attractive to Iowa voters on Feb. 1.

"I think it would be very damaging to our state," he said. "I believe it would be a big mistake for Iowa to support him. And I know he's ahead in the polls, but the only poll that counts is the one they take on Caucus Night, and I think it could change between now and then."

Branstad, who was elected to an unprecedented sixth term in office in 2014, will likely rally the support of Iowans

interested in ag-related issues, but it may not have the impact he expects. Rick Santorum, the 2012 Iowa Republican Caucus winner, campaigned and won in Iowa four years ago with a message about renewable fuels very similar to that being espoused by Cruz now.

The Iowa Republican establishment, of which Branstad is frequently seen as the flag bearer, also has a substantial problem with many of the voters in its base following the 43 percent hike in the state's gas tax last year. Some Cruz supporters in the Hawkeye State see the governor's comments instead as a "backhanded endorsement."

The Cruz campaign has yet to officially react to the "endorsement."