

The Corner

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Can Greens and Conservatives Get Along?

By [Jonah Goldberg](#) 

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[Ross Douthat](#), [Brad Plumer](#), [David Roberts](#), [Tim Carney](#), and our own [Reihan](#), among others, have been pondering the question. There's a lot of interesting stuff here. I for one would love to see more cooperation between greens and conservatives on the idiocy of ethanol and other corporate-welfare issues with negative environmental consequences. And while I'm hardly on Roberts' side of "climate politics," I can only endorse this:

There is, or ought to be, a win-win space in climate politics: reforming or removing government policies that do violence to both market and ecological principles. Libertarians and greens could go a decent distance together just on that basis, maybe building a little trust along the way.

For the record, a lot of folks have been making this case at places like Cato and CEI for a very long time. I also agree entirely with this bit from Tim:

However creative our policymakers and think-tankers are, they'll never be able to conceive of as many ways to enhance efficiency as can millions of people acting independently. So, the best way to address the overconsumption of fuel is to make sure government isn't obscuring prices in this area: stop subsidizing roads, stop subsidizing drilling, stop subsidizing sprawl, stop bailing out automakers and thus subsidizing them. At the same time, let's liberalize zoning laws and repeal some policies that prevent people from operating their own businesses.

But I also think there's a lot of confusion at work.

Here's Brad Plumer:

Quick, which gets subsidized more heavily around the world, fossil fuels or renewable energy? Bloomberg crunches the numbers and finds that it's not even close—oil, gas, and coal get a whopping twelve times as much total government support ... And those subsidies add up, pollution-wise. A report from Harvard's Kennedy Center last year found that the world could cut global CO2 emissions nearly 6 percent simply by scrapping price supports for fossil energy. And

yes, removing subsidies might, in the short term, have a regressive impact in the form of higher energy prices, but countries could easily take the money saved and use it to cushion the blow, via efficiency upgrades or even lump-sum payments. The worst offenders are China, India, and Russia, but note that the United States does plenty of fossil-fuel subsidizing, too. We may not bankroll gas-pump purchases the way Egypt or Venezuela do, but an analysis last year from the Environmental Law Institute found that the U.S. government offered \$72 billion in incentives for oil, gas, and coal producers between 2002 and 2008.

I haven't seen the actual report, only the Bloomberg story (and press release) on it. But a few points off the top of my head:

1) I'm surprised that the "global" subsidies aren't much *higher*, given that the biggest oil companies in the world are state-owned (Exxon-Mobil is a piker compared to, say, Aramco or Gazprom). In other words, they're socialist enterprises, and socialism is bad. It's a point I suspect many greens have a hard time processing. By all means, let's have Saudia Arabia, Russia, China, Brazil, Venezuela, and Iran abandon their subsidies, but *their* subsidies are very different than *our* subsidies.

2) The subsidies U.S. fossil-fuel companies receive, as a matter of principle, should go (though what counts as a subsidy as opposed to an "incentive" can be a tricky question). Oil and gas are profitable enough; they don't need help from taxpayers. But measured by the amount of energy produced by fossil fuels compared to the amount of energy produced by "green" industries, it's the green stuff that is getting way too much help from the government.

3) Let us hear no more about Keynesian multipliers! According to stimulus logic, subsidies and incentives for the oil and gas industry create some of the best-paying blue-collar jobs in the country. A "green job" for a guy with just a high-school diploma often amounts to a temporary gig replacing windows and rolling out insulation. Oil and gas work pays a lot better, as do all of those "shovel-ready" road- and bridge-building jobs that are an indirect subsidy to the internal-combustion-engine industry.

More thoughts later.

Update: [Good stuff from Spruiell.](#)

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