

From the Congressman: Congressman Dingell does not agree with the New York Times' portrayal of Senator Landrieu's actions. He believes that she is a superb United States Senator, and is a hero for her constituents in Louisiana.

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The Energy Bill: A Hero and a Villain

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

President Bush has just signed into law an energy bill that could have been even better but still remains an impressive achievement. The long struggle to produce that bill yielded the usual quotient of heroes and villains, but two deserve special mention:

John Dingell, who could have been a villain but chose to be a hero; and Mary Landrieu, who could have been a hero but chose to be a villain.

Mr. Dingell was a most unlikely hero. A Michigan Democrat and a reliable defender of the automobile industry, he had long resisted efforts to mandate new fuel efficiency standards, which had not been updated for more than 30 years.

But there has always been a softer, “greener” side to this crusty octogenarian that people often overlook. An architect of the original Clean Water Act of 1972, he cares a lot about wetlands preservation, endangered species and other environmental causes. He is also a fairly recent convert to the climate change issue, describing the global warming threat with phrases like “Hannibal is at the gates.”

So when Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, made a personal pledge to upgrade fuel efficiency standards, Mr. Dingell agreed, in exchange for one or two modest concessions, to get out of the way. He did more than that. When environmentalists complained that the Senate's mandate for a huge increase in ethanol could threaten forests, wetlands and conservation areas, Mr. Dingell made sure the final bill contained the necessary safeguards. He also insisted on a provision requiring that ethanol from corn or any other source produce a net benefit in terms of greenhouse gas emissions.

Ms. Landrieu was an altogether different story. The Louisiana Democrat broke ranks with her Democratic colleagues and gave President Bush and the Republican leadership the one-vote margin they needed to strike a key provision that would have rescinded about \$12 billion in tax breaks for the oil industry and shifted the money to research and development of cleaner sources of energy.

The White House argued that these tax breaks were necessary to insure the oil industry's economic health and to protect consumers at the pump. Given industry's \$100 billion-per-year profits, these arguments were absurd on their face, but Ms. Landrieu promoted both of them and added one of her own: The energy bill was "one-sided policymaking" that left "Louisiana footing the bill."

Never mind that the rest of the country is footing the bill for the repair and restoration of Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. That is a just and worthy cause and one that the nation is willing to help pay for. But isn't reducing oil dependency and global warming emissions by rewarding traditional fossil fuels a bit less, and rewarding newer, cleaner fuels a bit more, also a just and worthy cause? One that Louisiana could help pay for? That is something Ms. Landrieu might ask herself the next time she puts her state's interest ahead of the nation's.