



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on November 13, 2015

How Sweet It Isn't: Rubio Backs Big Sugar and His Donors

So far Marco Rubio has avoided having a debate moderator ask him about his support for Big Sugar, the U.S. sugar program that costs Americans billions of dollars every year either directly in their cereal bowl or indirectly through their income taxes. But he did try to [defend himself](#) at a small gathering of Heritage Action earlier this summer, with little success. He stated:



I'm ready to get rid of [the program] as long as Brazil does as well. [Brazil is] deliberately undercutting the price....

If they can wipe out American farmers, they know that land will be developed. Once ... condos [are built] on this land, you can never get it back into agriculture....

Then they can charge us anything they want.

This, as the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out, is the worst kind of argument to use: We should do it because they are doing it. It's hardly likely that Brazil will change its policies to please Americans, and so the sugar support program will remain unchallenged, at least by Rubio.

The U.S. sugar program, authorized by the 2002 farm bill, cuts Americans in two ways. First, through quotas, the price Americans pay for sugar is twice what foreigners pay. Second, by putting a floor on the price of sugar, the U.S. Department of Agriculture loses money when the price of sugar falls below 18 cents a pound. When the USDA loses money, so does the American taxpayer.

There is another reason for Rubio's willingness to offend his Tea Party supporters' political and economic sensibilities on the issue. As the *Journal* explained:

Let's see: If Americans don't pay double the world price for sugar, Pepe Fanjul will sell his [Florida] sugar acreage to home builders, who will pave over Florida and put us at risk of extortion from ... Brazil?

This national security line doesn't hold up.

Who is Pepe Fanjul? He and his brother, Alf, own Fanjul Corporation, along with numerous subsidiaries more familiar to Americans: Domino Sugar, Florida Crystals, C&H Sugar, Redpath Sugar, and Tate & Lyle European Sugar.

Why is this important to Rubio, and why should American taxpayers and voters care?

During his run for the Senate in 2010, Rubio was the recipient of maximum donations to his campaign by Pepe in the early going, when a campaign finance dollar is worth much more than dollars coming in later. Thanks to donations to Rubio through Florida Crystals, Rubio was able to secure his present Senate seat, for which he remains grateful to Pepe. He gave thanks to Pepe in his memoir, *An American Son*, in which he noted that the "crown jewel" of his fundraising efforts in 2010 was a weekend spent in the Hamptons with Pepe and other influential donors.



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The U.S. sugar program is perhaps the most egregious example of tariffs and protectionist policies that serve private interests at the expense of the consumer. In this case, it also costs the American taxpayer as well, a double-whammy running an estimated \$4 billion a year. As economist Mark Perry explained: “By ignoring sugar consumers in favor of sugar producers — by allowing crony capitalism to flourish — we’re now a poorer country with a lower standard of living.”

The fact that sugar can be produced much more cheaply outside the United States apparently carries little weight in Rubio’s calculations. Windsor Mann, writing in *National Review*, observed, “We have as much reason to grow our own sugar as Lithuania does to make its own cars. The fact is that other countries produce certain things more cheaply and efficiently than we do. That’s why we trade with them.”

It’s about protecting those inefficient jobs, and the flow of donor money, that informs Rubio’s continuing support of the sugar program. Following the Milwaukee debate, Rubio was candid: “I’m not going to wipe out an American industry that happens to have a lot of workers in Florida.”

And that also happens to provide his campaign with much needed donor dollars. That’s why it’s called protectionism. That’s why it’s called crony capitalism.

That’s why, the closer one looks at the real Rubio, one is increasingly unable to distinguish between the Florida senator and the (former) Florida governor who is also running for president.

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