

## Economy-wrecking, climate-denying, Brexit-supporting – and on a radio near you

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John Humphrys is a national treasure who brings news of the latest world affairs to a bleary-eyed nation with the BBC Today programme. Lord Lawson was once the nation's treasurer, and today tours the newsrooms advocating climate denial and an isolationist Brexit.

The release of Al Gore's latest film *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power* has put climate change firmly back on the agenda - including the fact coal, oil and gas companies have for decades paid public relations companies and front groups millions of dollars to attack the science of global warming.

Disappointing then, that a time-pressed researcher from the BBC would give the Global Warming Policy Foundation – which presents itself as a charity supported by politicians of all stripes - a call and that Lawson, its founder and chair of trustees for life would be made available for interview.

Lawson is literally the last man in Britain who should be appearing on the country's favourite source for balanced, intelligent daily news to discuss the issue of climate change. Not least, because he is precisely the kind of climate denier that Al Gore is trying to warn us about.

Lawson returned from political obscurity in the South of France to become Britain's most effective climate denier and from there a leading proponent of a hard Brexit. This month he appointed Terence Mordaunt, owner of the Bristol Port Company and big time Leave donor, as director of his Global Warming Policy Forum (set up so Lawson could side step charity law).

Indeed, Lawson sits at the very centre of the climate-denying and Brexit-supporting web of wealthy industrialists, PR spivs and corporate sponsored think tanks operating out of the now notorious 55 Tufton Street.

The choice of Lawson by the Beeb provoked outrage on social media. Professor Brian Cox, himself a BBC presenter and also a qualified scientist, attacked Lawson for amplifying “the same old claptrap”. He argued it was “irresponsible and highly misleading to give the impression that there is a meaningful debate about the science.”

Richard Black, the former BBC environment correspondent who was among the journalists to break the “Climategate” story, was equally scathing. He tweeted, “tbf, opinions can be as

inaccurate as you like. However, things presented as fact when they're bollocks ought to be flagged up as so."

The main objection to Lawson's appearance on the Today programme is simply that most of the claims and conjecture the former chancellor espoused are easily refuted. Black collated a twitter thread highlighting all of Lawson's "false statements" from the programme.

Lawson said Britain had "one of the the highest energy costs in the world". Steve Smith, the head of science for Parliament's Committee on Climate Change, provided a chart from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy showing Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Austria all had higher energy costs than the UK.

Lawson went on to say that average global temperatures "have slightly declined" since 2007. Roz Pidcock, head of communications for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, provided a chart where NASA, UEA, NOAA, Berkeley, and raw data from temperature stations each registered a clear and deeply concerning rise in temperatures since 2000 (and indeed, since 1880).

Lawson stated "we don't" subsidise fossil fuels, which is directly contradicted by a research paper published in the March 2017 issue of the World Development journal by David Coudy et al which found that "fossil fuel subsidies are large, amounting to 6.5 percent of global GDP in 2015." This is \$5.3 trillion. Among the more generous with subsidies is the European Union.

The online response to Lawson's claims - especially by Carbon Brief - was rapid, referenced and robust. Black, who will have conducted hundreds of interviews broadcast by the BBC, concluded "usually this frequency of errors would bar a guest for lack of expertise".

But the problem is the genie is already out of the bottle. Debunking climate denial myths is not as effective as we would like. It can even reinforce the false claims being made. The wealthy and powerful who benefited from Lawson's housing boom and market deregulation are likely to trust him over a bearded, sandal-wearing climate activist.

Sarah Sands, this year appointed the new editor of Today, should never have allowed Lawson to appear on the programme in the first place. This is not about freedom of speech. This is a matter of upholding the standards BBC listeners expect and assume are in place when they trust the broadcaster.

I spent five years researching Lawson and the GWPF. I began from a position of scepticism about what the Tory peer and architect of British neoliberalism would say about the biggest environmental issue of our times. But I was still shocked and angered by what I discovered.

Lawson was recruited to the climate denial campaign by a chap called David Henderson, an activist and advisor to the hard-line neoliberal think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs.

The IEA for decades accepted cash from tobacco companies while fighting the regulation of smoking, which still kills 100,000 people in Britain every year. The IEA also had links to big oil while publishing the first reports to attack the science of climate change.

Lawson and Henderson travelled together to the US to meet the head of US think tanks also paid by tobacco and big oil. And then they set up the GWPF in the UK. Lawson frequently spoke alongside S Fred Singer, the US-based, oil and tobacco supported granddaddy of climate denial. The GWPF has been represented at least one event alongside Philip Morris and Imperial Tobacco, an event funded by the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation.

Lawson has steadfastly refused to name the funders of the GWPF, even in defiance of his fellow parliamentarians. His financial backers, he says, “tend to be richer than the average person and much more intelligent than the average person”.

But among the money men behind the GWPF who I managed to expose are Neil Record, a currency speculator and trustee of the IEA; Lord Nigel Vinson, the industrialist, IEA stalwart and Brexiteer and also Lord Leach, who may or may not have shares in oil and gas. *The Guardian* also named Michael Hintze, who has handed millions to the Tories and donated to the Brexit campaign.

Lawson has said none of his funders have a “significant interest” in fossil fuels. However, the GWPF has benefited enormously from the non-pecuniary support of Lord Ridley, a member of its “academic advisory board” and AGM keynote speaker. Ridley enjoys an income from the two massive opencast coalmines on his family estate. As I reported for *DeSmog UK*, Ridley used to supply coal to a local power station until it was converted to biomass to comply with EU regulations.

Which all brings us back to Brexit. Lawson and Henderson when launching the GWPF spent considerable time networking and calling members of a particular political cohort: rich old men convinced by neoliberalism and ideologically opposed to almost all forms of regulation, and in particular environmental regulation.

These same men were the driving force behind the Vote Leave and Business for Britain campaigns. Ridley promoted BfB in the North East. He is brother-in-law to Owen Paterson, the one time Environment Secretary who set up Vision 2020 after a lavish dinner at the IEA with BP and British American Tobacco.

Graham Stringer, a right-wing Labour MP, has been a board member of Vote Leave and also a member of the board of trustees of the GWPF. Matthew Elliott is the former chief executive of Vote Leave and the founder of the Taxpayers’ Alliance. The TPA once had John Blundell on its advisory board, an employee of the oil baron Koch brothers who first imported climate denial to the UK when boss of the IEA.

Lawson was responsible for the Lawson boom. His financial deregulation arguably resulted in the 2008 economic crisis. Lord Ridley was the asleep-at-the-wheel chairman of Northern Rock, the collapse of which helped precipitated the crisis and last decade of economic hardship. Both men are now advocating a hard, right-wing, Dirty Brexit. Are they the best people to advise us on the risk posed by climate change?