



## Real, honest disagreement does exist

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November 21, 2017

Jerry Taylor, now head of the Washington-based, libertarian Niskanen Center, spent years working for the libertarian Cato Institute. At Cato, Taylor often expressed skepticism that human industrial activity is a major cause of global warming. A few years ago, though, he became convinced that his earlier position was mistaken. He now reads the evidence as showing that industrial activities indeed contribute to climate change.

Taylor changed his mind. That's admirable. A person who refuses to change his or her mind when confronted by new evidence or logic that runs contrary to that person's current beliefs has no business trying to persuade others of various policy proposals' merits. Dogma is no basis for evaluating public policies.

But this column isn't about Taylor. Not being a climate scientist, I can't say whether his change of mind is warranted or not. Instead, I draw your attention to a recent report about Taylor. Here's how Mother Jones describes him before his change of opinion: "He got paid to go on television to decry the science behind global warming." And near that report's end, we're told that "Taylor is the only known paid skeptic to change his tune." This wording is scandalously misleading.

It gives the false impression that when Taylor was expressing climate-change skepticism, he did so only because he was paid to do so. The report, although praising him for having "changed his mind," implies he was a hack for hire. But he was no such thing. Mother Jones' Taylor quotes make clear that he sincerely believed all he said and wrote earlier in his career.

Of course, Taylor was paid by Cato, just as Sierra Club and Greenpeace employees are paid. But contrary to the malicious impression the report conveys, he wasn't paid to say or write anything he did not then sincerely believe.

The report's wording about Taylor reflects, and reinforces, one of the left's most childish attributes — the refusal to understand that smart people of goodwill often sincerely disagree with core tenets of "progressivism." Routinely portraying people who disagree with them as mere mercenary mouthpieces reveals that many progressives are dogmatic. Their assumption apparently is that progressive arguments and conclusions are so indisputably correct that only a moron or a mercenary could disagree. Taylor, obviously no moron, thus must have been a mercenary during his climate-skeptic days.

The reality, of course, is that intelligent people of goodwill genuinely disagree on many issues. So, to leap to the conclusion that those who disagree do so only because they are paid to do so is an illegitimate way of avoiding serious thought and reflection. After all, if Taylor denies what I believe to be true only because he's paid to deny it, why should I bother even listening to his argument? Selling one's opinions for cash is not intellectually respectable.

True progress in human understanding is thwarted when we are so convinced of our beliefs' correctness that we conclude the only reason others would disagree is that they are paid to do so.