



# In his own words: Behind a one-time skeptic's climate 'flip'

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Over a period spanning about two decades, the mere mention of the name “Jerry Taylor” raised the hair on the necks of climate scientists nationwide.

And that was before they even heard or read Taylor’s words, most often disseminated via conservative news outlets like Fox News and conservative op-ed pages and in news articles of reporters striving for what some academics labeled “false balance.”

Part of the problem, truth be told, was that Taylor – from the early 1990s to 2014 the climate guru with the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. – was very good at what he did. What he actually did, many top climate scientists maintained, was very bad, and sorely deficient from the standpoint of scientific evidence. But very good, nonetheless, in terms of its messaging and its impact on helping to sow doubt.

The more he set climate scientists’ hair afire, after all, the more effectively he was accomplishing his and his colleagues’ goal of muddying the water on climate science: Disfavor from “mainstream” climate scientists was a badge of honor in his line of business. Mission accomplished.

With good TV looks, consistent messaging, a Wall Street-y white-collar presence, and a perch with an influential conservative D.C.-based think tank, Taylor was formidable: That was true not only during his two-plus decades with Cato, but also in his previous positions as staff director for energy and environment for the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council, [ALEC](#).

## **His due diligence made Taylor ‘increasingly uncomfortable’**

All that came to an end in the spring of 2014, when Taylor, as he puts it, “became increasingly uncomfortable” with the climate science positions he was parroting. In May of that year, having swallowed his concerns for as long as five years, Taylor decided the time had come “to liberate myself from the constraints of institutional orthodoxy.”

Taylor recounts his personal odyssey in an intriguing podcast produced by Stephanie Lepp of Reckonings, who, like Taylor, authorized Yale Climate Connections to use the podcast at this site. It’s a “must hear” for those in climate science, policy, and communications circles. (Spoiler

alert: The kindling that lit the fire of Taylor's change of view was sparked by none other than Joe Romm, the prolific and feisty principal behind Climate Progress.)

And one more spoiler alert: Jerry Taylor helped get his brother James his position at the Heartland Institute, where he leads opposition to the climate science and action Jerry Taylor now so fervently endorses. Few should expect the two Taylor brothers to raise the climate issue at year-end holiday family activities.

Read the following collection of direct quotations from the podcast: Taylor in his own words. And then sit back and hear out the podcast itself, well worth the 30 to 40 minutes it will demand from your busy work week.

### **Jerry Taylor in his own words**

*'I went to talk to a climate skeptic, a scientist ... for 20 minutes he hemmed and hawed ... so that put me back on my heels ... it shook me a lot!'*

*'I began to do the due diligence with the scientific narratives .... I found that far more often than not the same story would play itself out ... either the stories cherry-picked data ... not very good! They weren't in peer-reviewed journals .... I was becoming less and less comfortable with my position.'*

*'I was much more comfortable with the economics conversation ...'  
... until 'I could not find a credentialed economist who would argue against climate action, not a single one!'*

*... and then he was introduced to a 'soft libertarian' and climate activist with Goldman Sachs who Taylor said is known across the academic community as 'one of the top risk management intellectuals in the world.'*

*'So after about an hour and a half of talking this over ... it looks like our position just got shredded to pieces.'*

*'It was kind of invigorating ...'*

*'If you're in the risk management business ... like we are as a society ... uncertainty is the reason that you hedge against risk! Uncertainty is WHY you want to manage risk; the very fact of uncertainty DEMANDS the policy response.'*

*'I became increasingly uncomfortable with my position at the Cato Institute .... I decided it was time to liberate myself from the constraints of institutional orthodoxy and to re-engage with libertarian rhetoric not just on climate but on a whole host of issues.'*

*'Most people who do what I do for a living are not in the business of wrestling with the strongest arguments and strongest advocates for the other side. They're in the business of being the best spokesmen for their cause within their choir.'*

*'Because I had greater aspirations for myself, it required me to wrestle with the best arguments from the other side.'*

*'If all you're doing is talking to people who read Fox News, etc., it's pretty certain that your crowd is not up on this stuff.'*

*'As long as you're telling conservatives and the GOP what they want to hear, and you say it with brio and esprit de corps and tree huggers and cream cheese, you'll be just fine, you'll be on Tucker Carlson, you'll get your job done.'*

*'I didn't want to be diced and sliced on tv .... A lot of people ... don't care if they don't sound smart to smart people, because they don't care about that audience. They only care about the choir audience.'*

*'Most people aren't in the business of looking skeptically at things that they already agree with or want to agree with.'*

*'I know conservative Republicans very well .... I have a good relationship with them, and I can sit there with credibility and say: Look, I used to believe exactly what you believe. Hell, I wrote your talking points.'*

*'I wish earlier in my career I had done the due diligence with the arguments that I was tracking in. I do regret that, so that's something that I feel I have a lot to make up for.'*

*At the Niskanen Center, 'our aim is to talk to people who don't agree with us and make the case for why they ought to entertain changing their minds.'*

*'THAT is a more invigorating and challenging life than simply one-offing an op-ed for National Review or putting in an appearance at Fox to shout with the howler monkeys.'*