



Jerry Taylor addresses YPU on carbon tax

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“Time’s up. We need to act [on climate] now,” former climate change skeptic turned environmental advocate Jerry Taylor said to a packed Sudler Hall on Tuesday night.

Taylor, who is the president and founder of the Niskanen Center — a Washington D.C. think tank — debated the Yale Political Union on the topic: “Resolved: Free Market Solutions Can Solve Climate Change.” Once a denier of climate change, Taylor worked with the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, and helped pedal climate denialism. Taylor is part of a small but growing cohort of conservatives who have changed their views on climate change, even as the Trump Administration continues to roll back environmental regulations.

“I can sit with a legislator who’s somewhat skeptical about climate change and say, ‘I understand exactly why. I was [skeptical] too for 20-odd years, and virtually all of the talking points that you’ve been using to brush back climate activism, I wrote. Let me tell you why I changed my mind,’” Taylor said in an interview with the News before the event. “The messenger is often more important than the message.”

Still, Taylor’s transformation from climate change skeptic to carbon tax proponent was gradual. He first questioned his stance on the issue after realizing that some of the scientific narratives denying the severity of global warming were “dodgy” and at times intentionally misrepresentative, Taylor explained.

“We decide what we want to believe and use all of our reasoning power to justify the beliefs we want to hold,” Taylor said of his past views.

In his previous position as a climate skeptic, Taylor made a name for himself debating environmentalists about the degree to which climate change would affect the environment. However, Robert Litterman, who previously headed the risk department at Goldman Sachs, convinced Taylor that he had to prepare for the full range of outcomes of global warming, not only the most likely. An effective policy to address climate change would take into account the most catastrophic effects climate change could have — even if they are less likely, Taylor explained. He identified a carbon tax as the most effective way to address the climate crisis.

The YPU event was cosponsored by Students for Carbon Dividends — a bipartisan national student organization that advocates for a “free-market climate solution,” according to S4CD chapter leader Jack Pleasants ’21. The coalition, which is made up of college Republican and Democrat groups, was founded in 2018 by Alexander Posner ’19 and advocates for a carbon tax.

Taylor held that college students could still affect change, even if they do not have access to political elites.

“Well-organized interest groups can exert a lot of influence,” Taylor said, pointing to the movements that had “applied the heat” and prompted the Democratic Party to prioritize action against climate change.

“[Carbon dividends] are a way of solving climate change that strengthens the economy [while] at the same time [protects] our national environment,” Pleasants said.

He also emphasized bipartisan support for the carbon tax, citing that both Democratic and Republican backing is important for the policy’s longevity and political feasibility.

Taylor primarily lobbies political elites. He regretted there are only about six Republican congressmen who would sign onto climate legislation, though he said that was “better than zero.” He argued that though there are around 36 additional Republicans looking to sign onto ambitious climate legislation, they often feel limited due to the current political climate.

“Behind the scenes in the GOP there are tectonic plates that are shifting,” Taylor said.

According to Yale Political Union President Lucas Ferrer ’21, Taylor lent a unique perspective to the conversation around climate policy.

Hosting notable figures like Taylor allows students to “critically examine and respond to what guests put forward,” Ferrer told the News.