

Outside the Beltway

William Niskanen Dead at 78

JAMES JOYNER · WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2011

William Niskanen, one of the key architects of Ronald Reagan's economic policies and longtime chairman of the Cato Institute, has died. He was 78.

Oddly, while the news is all over Twitter, his Cato colleague **Chris Edwards'** personal reflection is the only news item I'm seeing:

We were all saddened today at Cato to learn of the death of our friend and colleague Bill Niskanen. Sitting down the hall from Bill over the past 10 years, I've learned a great deal from him about economics, fiscal policy, and perhaps most importantly, how to approach public policy work with balance, accuracy, and integrity.

Bill called them as he saw them. If he thought your work was in error, he'd tell you bluntly. But he always had time to help you work through issues and to discuss ideas and data at great length. He brought the same honesty to his views on political issues—he really didn't care what party label people had when judging their policies, and so he set the standard for Cato's nonpartisan analysis.

One impressive thing about Bill was the huge range of his policy interests and scholarship. At Cato, Bill tackled issues in fiscal policy, international trade, defense spending, foreign policy, public choice economics, macroeconomics, monetary policy, and corporate governance. He even published a statistical analysis of crime rates.

Bill was a mentor and a good friend, and I will miss him.

Cato has also done a cursory update to his **bio**:

William A. Niskanen, who passed away in 2011, was chairman emeritus and a distinguished senior economist at the Cato Institute. Between 1985 and 2008, Niskanen was the chairman of the Cato Institute, following service as a member and acting chairman of President Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers. Niskanen also served as director of economics at the Ford Motor Company, professor of economics at the University of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles, assistant director of the federal Office of Management and Budget, a defense analyst at the Rand Corporation, the director of special studies in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the director of the Program Analysis division at the Institute of Defense Analysis. He wrote on many public policy issues including corporate governance, defense, federal budget policy, regulation, Social Security, taxes, and trade. Niskanen's 1971 book *Bureaucracy and Representative Government* is considered a classic.

I don't know the cause of death or whether he had been ill. He certainly leaves behind a major legacy as an economic thinker and, it would seem, some good friends.