

## William Niskanen, RIP

*Nick Gillespie* | October 26, 2011

We're very sorry to report that William Niskanen, the chairman emeritus of the Cato Institute, former head of Ronald Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers, and one of the great figures in the libertarian movement, has passed away at the age of 78. Our deepest condolences to his wife, daughters, and colleagues at the Cato Institute.

Cato has an obituary up. Here's part of it, detailing the episode that led to his being fired by the Ford Motor Company:

Niskanen's 1980 departure from the Ford Motor Company was recounted in several books and in a *Wall Street Journal* profile. These accounts concluded that Niskanen's departure had been forced upon him due to his principled opposition to protectionist trade policies. "Mr. Niskanen's sermons against the protectionist temptation weren't exactly what Ford management wanted to hear," wrote the *Journal's* Robert Simison. "It soon decided to launch anyway what has become an active publicity and lobbying campaign for government controls on Japanese autos. ...They also decided they didn't need Mr. Niskanen's advice. They fired him."

*Reason* Senior Editor Brian Doherty, currently on a leave to write a biography of Ron Paul, worked closely with Bill years ago at Cato. He notes that Niskanen

...was a legend for his bravery in speaking up to his bosses at Ford Motors, telling them "a common commitment to refrain from seeking special favors serves the same economic function as a common commitment to refrain from stealing" and getting fired for it. He was no firebrand, just a decent, quiet guy who really, really loved doing economics; I recall piles of equation-heavy serious econ papers always sat around his office and in his printer. I don't think he ever sought a position as the guy who fell on a sword for principle. He simply understood the principles and reasonably wondered why other intelligent people, and businesses, didn't. He was a quiet but effective grandboss...and I'm grateful to have had him as my first editorial supervisor in the magazine business.

John Samples of Cato, who worked closely with Niskanen, remembers his colleague in a moving podcast. Listen to it [here](#).

Read Niskanen's selected works.