

# THE ROSSLAND TELEGRAPH

## Evolution of a one-time climate 'skeptic'

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Climate change policy analyst\* Jerry Taylor spent more than 25 years earning his well-deserved reputation as the skunk at the picnic of American climate scientists.

Taylor – the focus of this month’s “This is Not Cool” video – cut his teeth as an energy and environment savant with the very conservative American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), where he worked from 1988 to 1991. Then, from 1991 to 2014, he was with the free-market Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., where he eventually became a vice president. Through many of those years, Taylor was a frequent spokesperson for those scientists who regularly challenged whether climate change is real, human-caused, or, in either event, worth worrying about or doing anything to address.

A frequent commentator and analyst on those media outlets on the right politically – think Fox News, the Wall Street Journal editorial page, *Regulation* magazine – Taylor earned the respect of those generally regarded as “skeptics.” He now has come to call some of those Fox News hosts who had given him so much precious air time “howler monkeys,” just one example of his facile way with words that makes him so quotable and so sought-after by many in the news media.

But along with the preening admiration bestowed on Taylor from many of those most stridently rejecting climate science or any effort to manage climate risks, he also won the very begrudging respect of those mainstream climate scientists and policy advocates who, while admiring his communications savvy and stage presence, trashed what they dismissed as his pseudo-science proclamations.

The 'before-and-after' of a once-prominent climate contrarian ... now a strong voice for action. [Click To Tweet](#)

Those scientists readily identified with organizations such as the IPCC, the National Academy of Science, and NASA and NOAA had a shared viewpoint: Not only did they think Taylor was simply “drinking the Kool Aid” prepared and fed to him by fossil fuel-funded interests, but they also recognized that he was effective – that is, very good. Very good, they would say, at doing very bad things in terms of undercutting public understanding of what many see as an existential threat to modern society and the global economy. And very good at having contributed to the polarized impasse that continues to shroud the climate change issue, particularly on Capitol Hill.

### **Jerry Taylor: Version #1 vs. Version #2**

But that was Jerry Taylor, Version #1. That is the Jerry Taylor who from 2000 through 2009 was spending lots of his free time designing wargames for computer gaming enthusiasts.

Then came Jerry Taylor, Version #2. That's the Jerry Taylor who – after doing what he describes as his own “due diligence” – has come to fully accept and endorse the peer-reviewed scientific evidence on human-caused climate change that Earth's atmosphere has warmed over the past half-century-plus primarily as a result of human emissions of greenhouse gases, specifically including carbon dioxide.

Jerry Taylor Version #2 goes further. Having studied under-graduate political science at the University of Iowa, but without graduating, Version #2 now also accepts the need to address and manage climate change impacts . . . and risks and accepts also the economic rationale, indeed necessity, for doing so now, rather than putting it off until . . . forever . . . as he long had argued for.

Having left behind him the Cato Institute and other climate “contrarian” partisans, interests, and individual climate science “deniers,” Taylor may yet come to be seen, in this second iteration, as being among the most quotable and effective communicators and proponents for climate action. And as one who to at least some extent has the ear of many on Capitol Hill disinclined to be seen as accepting the science or policy gravitas of ongoing atmospheric warming.

Jerry Taylor Version #1 and Jerry Taylor Version #2. It's kind of a BC/AD situation, and an evolution that was triggered, interestingly enough, by a face-to-face challenge from well-known and feisty climate action activist and author Joe Romm, of the Center for American Progress and Climate Progress website.

Strange bedfellows that, many would surely say.