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Ben Affleck changes *Argo* postscript for Ken Taylor

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This is a story with a novel Hollywood ending: how Ken Taylor and Ben Affleck became new best friends after the *Star* revealed that Taylor's pals were offended by the way he was portrayed in Affleck's new movie *Argo*.

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When Affleck heard about the controversy, he picked up the phone and called Taylor, Canada's former ambassador to Iran. And as Affleck explained Tuesday in an exclusive interview with the *Star*, he told Taylor, "If you have issues, I'll address them."

The result: a postscript line onscreen at the end of the movie, which Taylor's friends regarded as an insult both to him and to Canada, has been removed and replaced by a new postscript: "The involvement of the CIA complemented efforts of the Canadian embassy to free the six held in Tehran. To this day the story stands as an enduring model of international co-operation between governments."



Former Canadian ambassador to Iran Ken Taylor with *Argo* director Ben Affleck on Monday in a soundstage on the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank, Calif.

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Argo is the tale of how six U.S. diplomats escaped from Iran, after extremists seized control of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and took 63 people hostage. The six were sheltered at the Canadian embassy until they made their escape in January 1980. (The others were not released until 1981.)

When *Argo* had its world premiere at a TIFF gala at Roy Thomson Hall on Sept. 7, the suggestion was that CIA operatives were the true heroes in the six fugitives' escape. The old postscript sent the message that, for political reasons, Canada took the credit. A sarcastic kicker noted that Taylor received 112 citations. The clear implication was that he did not deserve them.

When Affleck phoned Taylor, he said, "Frankly, if this bothers you, then I'll change it."

At Affleck's invitation, Taylor, now 77, and his wife, Pat Taylor, flew from their New York home to Los Angeles, checked into the Four Seasons Hotel and attended a private screening of *Argo* on the Warner Bros. lot. Before this week, they had not seen it.

"I expressed my concern with certain details in the movie," Taylor told me just before leaving his hotel to catch a flight back to New York. "In reality, Canada was responsible for the six and the CIA was a junior partner. But I realize this is a movie and you have to keep the audience on the edge of their seats. Ben was very gracious and we got along really well. There are a few points I want to address. Now Ben and I both feel free to talk about them."

So well, in fact, that Taylor and his wife taped a commentary for the extra features on the DVD version of *Argo*, which will not be released until 2013.

"I'm so pleased this had a great happy ending," Affleck says.

Indeed, he spent hours hanging out with Taylor and his wife, touring the Warner Bros. lot and having lunch there.

"I love Ken," adds Affleck. "I already had so much respect for him before we met. He is a class act."

Affleck invited the Taylors to attend both the L.A. premiere of the movie on Oct. 6 and a special Washington, D.C., screening on Oct. 10. They declined the L.A. event but will happily be front and centre for the D.C. screening.

"We're making it into a 'Thank you Canada' occasion," says Affleck. Many key Canadians will be invited, he promises.

That's quite a contrast to the Toronto premiere. Taylor wasn't invited to that gala and, according to his friends, that was lucky, given the suggestion that he didn't really deserve his status as the hero who masterminded the escape of the six U.S. diplomatic workers.

The movie gives the leading role to a CIA employee named Tony Mendez, played by Affleck, who came up with a scheme for a fake supposedly Canadian movie called *Argo*. The fugitives were disguised as a film crew and smuggled out on fake Canadian passports.

According to Taylor, several details of the plot are pure fiction. There was never any crisis about getting the plane tickets for the six, as in the climatic scenes of *Argo*, because he bought three sets of plane tickets, paid for by Pat Taylor. Nor did Taylor ever threaten to close down the Canadian embassy, leaving his secret U.S. house guests with nowhere to hide. Nor did the six ever go to a bazaar.

"I would never have allowed that," says Taylor.

And oh, by the way, while in Tehran, Mendez was taken care of by the Canadian embassy.

"What matters to me is the essence and importance of diplomacy," Taylor sums up. "It matters more now than ever before. It's a risky business but vitally important.

"You can't just close the office," he adds, in an apparent swipe at Ottawa's recent decision to close the Canadian embassy in Iran.

For Ben Affleck, what counts is this: "It's important to tell stories about how two countries worked together."

Fade out on Hollywood's real-life bromance.

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