

19 July, 2010

In Memoriam: Stephen Schneider, 1945-2010

The world of climate science lost one of its greatest minds and strongest voices on July 19 with the death of Steve Schneider. Steve, who was 65, was a major contributor to the IPCC and one of its fiercest supporters. He was looking forward with enthusiasm to serving as a coordinating lead author for the Fifth Assessment Report.

Steve was a leading member of the climate science community for over 40 years. As a post-doc at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in the early 1970's, he was one of the first researchers to use climate models to look carefully at the role of anthropogenic CO₂ and aerosols in climate change. Steve's scholarly approach, combining world-class research with deep commitment to broad communication, set a remarkable standard of excellence. In a career that took him from GISS to the National Center for Atmospheric Research (1972-1996), to Stanford University (1992-2010), Steve published more than 450 scientific papers, and advised the administrations of 8 presidents (every president from Nixon to Obama). He was the founder and editor of the interdisciplinary journal *Climatic Change*, editor in chief of the *Encyclopedia of Climate and Weather*, and the author of many books, including *Laboratory Earth: The Planetary Gamble We Cannot Afford to Lose* and, most recently, *Science as a Contact Sport: Inside the Battle to Save the Earth's Climate*.

Steve was one of the most stalwart contributors to the IPCC and, almost certainly, its most vociferous supporter. An intellectual leader and dedicated author on all four IPCC assessments, he was on every Working Group II Summary for PolicyMakers writing team, and he was a key contributor to the Synthesis Reports for the Third and Fourth Assessment Reports. Steve was coordinating lead author on the influential Chapter 1, "Overview of Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability to Climate Change" (2001) in the Third Assessment Report and chapter 19, "Assessing Key Vulnerabilities and the Risk from Climate Change", in the Fourth Assessment Report (2007). He also co-authored the IPCC guidance paper on uncertainties, a durable foundation for clear communication of complicated science. But Steve was always a person for whom the most exciting challenge was the next one planned, and he was especially enthusiastic about his new role as coordinating lead author on chapter 18, "Detection and Attribution of Observed Impacts", in the Fifth Assessment Report (2014).

Although he was prodigiously productive as a scientist, Steve probably realized his greatest impacts as an educator and spokesperson. A gripping and eloquent speaker, he had a gift for expressing complicated ideas in terms that made sense to people from all walks of life. Steve also had a remarkable

ability to help people understand why they should care about an issue. He could, in a few sentences, range from dispassionate and analytical to fiery and angry, with a couple of memorable jokes in the middle. Sometimes, words poured from Steve at a dizzying rate. But regardless of the pace, Steve was invariably engaging. His arguments were based on the best available data. He never overstated his case. And he had a rare gift for turning a phrase that not only crystallized an important idea but also lodged it in your memory.

Steve's message was one of single-minded focus on a core concept – scientific integrity. He was a warrior for honesty and a dedicated campaigner for giving people the complete story. As an advocate for honest, careful science, Steve was tireless. He wrote prolifically (his dense emails are world renowned), travelled constantly, and regaled everyone, from students to CEOs to political leaders, with his message about the importance of solid science, clear communication, and passing a sustainable world to future generations.

Steve was a compelling teacher. He had a gift for transporting his students into the thick of the most important discoveries and political battles. This first-person view was partly a consequence of his skill as a communicator, but it was also a consequence of Steve's being a central figure over decades of key breakthroughs. From the major discoveries to the insights that moved IPCC negotiations forward, Steve really was there. He was there for the triumphs, the frustration, the arguments, the deliberations, and the fun. The community was much richer for his presence, and we will sorely miss him.

Chris Field, WGII co-chair,
Vicente Barros, WGII co-chair
WGII TSU