

"SEVENTY PERCENT OF AMERICANS WANT SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE. THE PROBLEM IS, THEY ALL WANT SOMEBODY ELSE TO DO IT"

Published on January 6, 2008

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

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Stephen Schneider is not a dispassionate scientist.

Schneider, a Stanford science professor and contributor to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with former Vice President Al Gore, said that while the general public is coming to grips with the threat of global warming, there remains too much political aversion to change.

"If you think I'm angry about it, you're right," he said. "The only place left that doesn't buy into it anymore is the West Wing of the White House."

Schneider will speak on global warming at the Wells Fargo Center for the Arts Monday night. The event is free.

Withdrawal from a key international climate change treaty, subsidies for SUV buyers and failure to clamp down on domestic emissions have contributed to international impatience with the United States, Schneider said.

"The U.S.'s behavior has been somewhere between ignorant and irresponsible. We are not loved ... we are viewed as greedy," he said.

For more than 35 years, Schneider has been studying the atmosphere, greenhouse gases and climate change science.

A professor of interdisciplinary environmental studies, biological sciences, and civil and environmental engineering at Stanford, Schneider has been actively involved with the U.N.'s climate change panel since its inception in 1988 and appeared alongside Gore in a news conference to accept the Nobel prize in October.

The climate panel groups more than 2,000 scientists from more than 130 nations to study science and help guide governments.

"He is a personality in the field, globally," said Paul Zamarian of the Sonoma County Chapter of the United Nations Association, which is co-sponsoring Monday night's talk.

Tanya Narath, executive director of the Leadership Institute for Ecology and the Economy, an event co-sponsor, said she hopes the discussion Monday will deliver scientific information in an easily understood manner.

"You see these news stories about the latest scientific findings and what they are finding and why we should be concerned," she said. "This is covering science, but in a way that people like myself can understand."

Schneider advocates penalties for those who pollute and rewards for those who reduce their environmental impact.

He suggests eliminating big vehicle subsidies, tightening building codes to require so-called green standards, increasing vehicle license fees for large cars and crediting those who buy fuel efficient vehicles.

“Seventy percent of Americans want solutions to climate change,” he said. “The problem is, they all want somebody else to do it.”

Advocates for change say it can be difficult to convince people that changing their light bulbs will really make a difference in combatting melting ice caps, wildfires and diminishing air quality.

“Those everyday solutions, changing light bulbs, switching to the energy-efficient washing machine, that is not going to get us where we need to be,” said Margaret Pennington, chairperson of the 10,000-member Redwood Chapter of the Sierra Club, another co-sponsor of Monday’s talk.

But those changes do help and, more importantly, they energize people to agitate for more far-reaching political change, she said.

“It means you have people buying into the idea that we need these larger solutions,” she said.

“The leaders will follow.”

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