

The legacy of Rajendra Pachauri: a personal reflection

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It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak about the profound legacy of Rajendra Pachauri, a legendary figure in the battle to address the climate crisis. To his friends, among whom I was fortunate enough to count myself, he was just ‘Patchy’.

I first became aware of Patchy back in 2001, during the early years of my scientific career, just a few years after I had published the now-iconic ‘hockey stick’ curve (Mann 2013), when I was a relatively young assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Virginia.

Patchy was running to be the new chairperson of IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Climate inactivists – a term I use to describe a coalition of fossil-fuel companies, front groups, politicians, and media outlets doing their bidding (Mann 2021) – disapproved of the current chair, an American scientist named Bob Watson, who had been appointed during the Clinton era, and had opposed the tepid climate policies of the Bush Administration. As reported in *Science* magazine (Bagla 2002), “The Bush Administration and the fossil fuel industry cynically promoted Dr. Pachauri’s election in hopes that the IPCC, under his leadership, would be less credible and effective than under Dr. Watson”.

I always smile when I read that statement. I like to imagine how terribly disappointed climate inactivists must have been, for Patchy showed himself to be more than up to the task at hand. He proved to be a remarkably effective and forceful champion for science-based climate action. Indeed, his efforts were recognized with a Nobel Prize—when, under his chairmanship, the IPCC and Al Gore were co-awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for advancing the causes of both climate awareness and climate action. It was a truly fitting tribute to Patchy’s legacy.

Rajendra Pachauri provided support for me for years while I was under attack by the forces of climate denial and climate inaction in their campaign to discredit the now-iconic ‘hockey stick’ graph—attacks that I have described in detail elsewhere (Mann

2013). Patchy understood the detrimental impacts such attacks can have on an individual having suffered many attacks himself by those looking to discredit him as a climate messenger. He provided assistance and counsel, both publicly and privately, at a very difficult time, and it meant a lot to me.

I was terribly saddened when I learned of Patchy's passing last year. He is among a handful of truly heroic figures in the climate movement – including Stephen Schneider and Sherry Rowland – that I was honored to know both as leaders in the climate movement and as friends.

I remain optimistic that we will rise to the challenge of addressing the climate crisis before it is too late. And when we do, it will in substantial part be attributable to Patchy's efforts.

References

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