

James Elliott Obituary



James Albert Merten Elliott died January 12, 2024, at home in Arlington, VA, after a long battle with cancer. He was 79 years old. Jim was born in Seattle on September 9, 1944, and attended the Seattle public schools K-12. He completed an AB degree at Yale University in 1966 and graduated Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, with a double major (a special program) in political science and economics. He won a Marshall Scholarship to the London School of Economics,

where he completed an MS degree in Economics in 1968.

Jim returned to Yale University for a Ph.D. in economics in 1972. His doctoral research was published that year by Yale University as *International Comparisons of Social Welfare: A Factor Analytic Approach* (282 pages). He then joined the University of Michigan's Center for Research on Economic Development (CRED) and taught economics in Cameroon at the University of Yaounde in French, which he had to learn from scratch. From 1976 to 1980 Jim served as Assistant Professor of Economics at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. He joined the U.S. Agency for International Development in 1981 as a Foreign Service Officer and served in various capacities there for 28 years until his retirement in 2009. He served overseas for 4 years in Bamako, Mali, where he worked on budget reform and civil service reform, among other issues, as the USAID Mission Program Economist.

In Washington he served in the Bureaus for Africa, for Latin American & the Caribbean, and for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade. His work took him to USAID field missions throughout the world. His return to USAID/Washington coincided with the collapse of Communism in general and the USSR in particular. Jim had taken introductory Russian in summer school between his freshman and sophomore years in college (back in the 1960s) could still use it which, of course, made him the exception to the rule in AID and resulted in several short trips to Moscow.

As a USAID economist, Jim brought analytical excellence to the Agency's understanding of the development challenges. His insights helped raise the quality of the debate on economic issues among USAID's economic growth community. Many USAID economists sought Jim's input to their research in progress, collaborations that he cherished. Notable among Jim's many contributions to USAID's work were his economic analyses of coca production and alternative crop development in South America, which were used and cited by the interagency, and his editorship (and frequently authorship) of EGAT (now IPI) Bureau's EG Technical Briefings and Economist Working Papers on economic growth topics important to USAID programs. Jim at times sparked controversy when his thorough economic analyses pointed in directions at odds with conventional wisdom, but his gentle

way of getting needed points into the conversation made USAID's work better. Jim was a valued mentor and friend to the USAID economist community.

Jim is survived by his wife of 52 years, Robin Gates Elliott, cousins Kathryn Shaw, Barbra Mage, and Jack Morgan, and by a large number of former USAID friends and colleagues who will miss his constant good humor and brilliant mind. James's inurnment was held at Acacia Memorial Park in Seattle, WA, on Saturday, February 17. In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting that donations be made to the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle.