

Children's advocate urges new priorities

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Edelman credits women with forcing change

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Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, said Tuesday at Furman University that women will need to speak up to a "world desperate for moral leadership and community."

"Women have been extraordinary pests for change," said Edelman, a Yale law school graduate and Bennettsville native. "It's not right to take money from Head Start to give tax breaks for millionaires. I think we must speak up."

The audience, mostly women, applauded several times during her 55-minute speech, which focused on the status of children.

"A child is abused every 30 seconds," and in the world's "richest nation, a child is born in poverty every 41 seconds," she said.

Edelman, the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar, said patience and persistence earned women voting rights and that civil rights laws didn't come without a struggle.

"All of our voices, especially women's voices, have to say enough is enough," she said.

"The first thing we must do is not be afraid to take risks or make mistakes," Edelman said. "I hope we will stand up and speak the truth. The truth is an important commodity."

Why? Why? she repeatedly asked.

"Why are missiles called peacekeepers when they are aimed to kill?" she asked.

Besty Moseley, who works in Furman's development office, said she first heard Edelman speak 20 years ago.

"Yeah, we need to do more to change our priorities," Moseley said.

Margie Pizarro, a fifth-grade teacher at Sistine Elementary, said all too often children who are born in poverty aren't "ignited by learning" until they reach school while other children begin learning much earlier.

"It's amazing," said Nadia Savova, a Furman international student Bulgaria. "Every thing she said about children isn't only taking place in the United States but all over the world."

Edelman said America spends money on prisons that should be allocated to building schools.

"Why are nations and states unwilling to invest in children's lives? We don't have a money problem in America, we have a priorities problem. Change the priorities in this world for children."

Outline: OWEN RILEY JR. / Staff

Meeting Edelman: Children's Defense Fund founder Marian Wright Edelman, left, and Richard Riley, the former

South Carolina governor and U.S. secretary of education, greet guests Tuesday at Furman University on the second day of a "Women and Politics" forum sponsored by the Richard W. Riley Institute of Government, Politics and Public Leadership.

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