

Glenn: international cooperation needed to improve environment

by Kate Hofler, FUnet writer
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To a packed house of nearly 900 people, John Glenn, a “true American hero” according to former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, delivered a compelling speech on the decaying status of our environment.

Furman students, faculty, and guests had the unique opportunity to listen to the first American to enter orbit discuss his view of the world from the outside looking in. Glenn’s vivid description of Earth’s atmosphere as “a prism breaking up the sun’s rays into a full spectrum of colors” offered a different perspective for many in attendance. Glenn, a former U.S. Senator, mentioned this experience to stress the delicacy of our atmosphere. “At 40,000 feet above sea level, you are already 80 percent above Earth’s atmosphere,” Glenn said to further emphasize this point.

Glenn opened his speech with the reminder that the environmental crisis is not merely a national problem. “Water and air blow and flow across our boundaries and we need to all work together to respond to the recent unprecedented changes in climate.” Aside from the importance of the cooperation of all nations, Glenn also focused on the status the United States has as the biggest polluter and energy user in the world. According to Glenn, “California alone produces 1.8 percent of the world’s greenhouse gases.”

While the problem of global warming has become a household topic, Glenn issued a call to action. Beginning with awareness and individual conservation, he offered his own suggestions for change.

Glenn’s one “energy wish” as he described it is “to have large scale electric energy storage” to convert forces of nature into surpluses of electric energy similar in concept to a massive battery. This harnessed electric energy would enhance national security with a lessened dependence on foreign oil. Glenn believes that the development of such a means of storage is as worthy an undertaking as the Manhattan Project was and “could alter the shape of the world to come.”

Glenn then entertained a question and answer period that tackled such issues as the failure of public education to provide adequate teaching in math and science. He focused on the dire need for teachers to educate their students on the environmental crisis at hand. Maggie Brown, a senior education major, was excited to hear Glenn mention an issue that many educators are neglecting. According to Brown, “the standardized tests that grade schools on performance do not leave room for the exploration of current issues involving the environment.”

Glenn concluded his presentation with advice to a local science teacher to encourage her students to keep their childlike curiosity and instill in them a sense of duty to protect the world.