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Christine Todd Whitman says clean air, not climate, should be focus of energy talks

Furman's Shi honored at dedication ceremony

By Rudolph Bell • Staff Writer • March 3, 2010

Advocates of capping carbon emissions are more likely to succeed politically by arguing for energy independence and clean air instead of sounding dire warnings about climate change, a former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency said Tuesday during a visit to Furman University.

Christine Todd Whitman, EPA administrator from 2001 to 2003 and Republican governor of New Jersey before that, spoke about environmental policy and sustainability at Furman as a guest of its Riley Institute.

She told *The Greenville News* that the concept of global warming has "become so politically fraught" that it's no longer helpful to those who would cap carbon emissions.

"It's the kind of thing that just puts people in their bunkers and they refuse to discuss it in a logical, rational way," Whitman said. Advocates of capping carbon emissions would fare better framing the debate in terms of energy needs and clean air, she said.

Cleaning the air for human health is "a more understandable argument for people to relate to than the climate is changing and we need to reduce greenhouse gases," Whitman said.

She joined a panel discussion that also included Andrew Revkin, former environmental reporter for *The New York Times* and David Hales, president of College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor.

About 100 people listened in the Younts Center, including Richard W. Riley, former Democratic governor of South Carolina and U.S. education secretary, for whom the Riley Institute is named.

Also Tuesday, the Furman community recognized David Shi, the university's outgoing president, for his longtime advocacy of sustainability during a dedication ceremony for the David E. Shi Center for Sustainability.

The center promotes sustainability through outreach programming, curricular development and original research. Its lobby now includes a bust of Shi, who is retiring after 16 years as Furman president.

Holding his granddaughter, Shi said during the ceremony that he wants to protect her future in an increasingly crowded world.

"The challenges are urgent and they're not readily solved. We don't have a minute to waste," he said, drawing a standing ovation.

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