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John Glenn urges large-scale electrical energy storage

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GREENVILLE, S.C. - Former astronaut and senator John Glenn urged the nation to research large-scale storage of electrical energy, saying it "would be a world-changing discovery."

"We can convert all the forces of nature to electrical energy, but we can't store it," Glenn said during a speech Monday night at Furman University. "I'd like to see a 'Manhattan Project' for storing energy," he said, referring to the top-secret project that created the atomic bomb in the 1940s.

His speech was the start of the three-day conference, "The Environment: Critical Issues of the 21st Century."

Glenn, 85, applauded California's effort to cut greenhouse gases and Brazil's production of ethanol from sugar cane, but said most scientists agree "we're in trouble if we don't do something" about greenhouse gases from cars and power plants.

Glenn, who served in the Senate from 1974 to 1998, piloted the first manned orbital mission by the United States in 1962. He went back into space aboard the space shuttle in 1998, at the age of 77.

Glenn said was disappointed the United States backed out of the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement among 160 industrialized nations to reduce greenhouse gases. President Bush declined to submit the treaty to Congress for ratification.

Treaty critics say it would hurt the U.S. economy and exempt China.

"There are a lot of problems with it," Glenn said. "If I were president, I wouldn't have signed it either. But I would have continued negotiating because it affects the whole world."

Glenn, who ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984, said the first person to get a handle on large-scale electrical energy storage "is going to change the energy patterns of the world."

"It affects the whole world what we do. We're the biggest user of energy. We're the biggest polluter," he said. "Societies basically succeed or fail based on how they use energy."

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