

Ex-astronaut Glenn targets air pollution
Earth in trouble if greenhouse gases aren't contained, he tells Furman crowd

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Former astronaut and U.S. Sen. John Glenn said at Furman University on Monday that global warming has caused hotter summers and more intense rainfall – and it's just the start if something isn't done about greenhouse gases.

Kicking off a three-day conference on the environment, Glenn applauded California's effort to cut greenhouse gases by 25 percent and Brazil's production of ethanol from sugar cane.

But Glenn said if he had one wish, it would be for large-scale electrical energy storage. His hope is that hydrological, geothermal and other natural forces will one day be harnessed and then saved, so they can be used whenever and wherever they're needed, he said.

"It would be a world-changing discovery," Glenn told a crowd of about 800.

Advertisement Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth on Feb. 20, 1962. He was a Democratic senator from Ohio from 1974 until 1998 and went into space at age 77, making him the oldest astronaut in history.

Glenn said he decided to visit Furman after an invite from former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, who has an institute at the university named after him.

In a speech that lasted about a half-hour, Glenn said most scientists agree that "we're in trouble if we don't do something" about greenhouses gases belched from cars and plants.

Those gases have been linked to global warming.

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

Critics of the treaty say it would hurt the U.S. economy and exempt China, a major polluter.

"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 predicted the development of electric cars with a 250-mile range. He said his energy-storage dream could help make the cars more practical because the electricity could be produced without power plants belching pollution.

Researchers in Cleveland, Ohio, have begun working on ways of storing power, he said. They theorized that they could store the output of a 1,000-megawatt plant, generated at off-peak times and get back about 70 percent, Glenn said.

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