Energy as a National Security Issue

April 04, 2011 3:45 AM Ryan Rivet
rrivet@tulane.edu

For more that 40 years, Brent Blackwelder has been on the front lines of the environmental battle. On Friday (April 1) he was in Weinmann Hall, delivering the keynote speech at the 16th annual Environmental Law Summit at Tulane Law School. The title of this year's summit was "The Energy Equation."

Brent Blackwelder, president emeritus of Friends of the Earth, delivers the keynote speech at the 16th annual Environmental Law Summit presented by Tulane Law School. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

Blackwelder, a former president of Friends of the Earth and the senior environmental lobbyist in Washington, D.C., urged the summit's audience to look at environmental policy as a national security issue.

"For most of the last century, national security was thought only in a military context," Blackwelder said. "But now, I think the greatest threats to our nation and to civilizations all over stem not from military threats, but rather from a range of environmental factors."

Blackwelder pointed to what he called "oil wars" being waged in Iraq, Nigeria, Ecuador and Peru as examples of military actions being taken in the name of securing large oil stores. However, he said, the destabilizing effect of fossil fuels goes beyond the conflicts they engender. According to Blackwelder, environmental issues such as weather disasters and the rising sea level will pose a far greater threat to nations.

"If you are governing and you are spending more and more of your regular budget on rescue missions [due to climate disasters]â?¦ governmental performance is going to be stretched to the burdening point," Blackwelder said. "This is not the recipe for stability, this is a recipe for serious problems."

Blackwelder concluded by saying the argument that renewable energy sources are technologically problematic no longer holds water. He instead pointed the finger at the global political sway of large energy providers.

"Technical feasibility is not the problem," said Blackwelder. "The problem is the political obstacles from the power and influence that certain entities are bringing to bear. What's technically feasible is not being done."