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Inglis' H-Prize nearing the finish line
Bill, set to hit the House, would advance hydrogen use

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By Jenny Munro
BUSINESS WRITER
jmunro@greenvillenews.com

The H-Prize -- a collection of awards designed to encourage research and development of hydrogen technology -- is a step closer to reality.

The House Science Committee passed on a voice vote the H-Prize Act of 2006, initiated by U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-SC. The bill is expected to come before the full House of Representatives next week, he said, an unusually fast turn-around for a bill introduced last month.



On Thursday, Inglis characterized the prize and the move to a hydrogen-based economy as a triple play -- "We can clean up the air, create jobs by re-inventing the car and make this country more secure."

He said he's pleased that the "H-Prize legislation is part of the long-term response to the pain of high gas prices. The reality of this is we're in a difficult situation with gas prices that is going to take time to get out of."

Advertisement But he said, "Hydrogen is not as far away as we might think. It and other alternatives are getting closer as the price of gas goes up."

A significant committee-generated change included setting the grand prize total at \$10 million in federal funds with up to \$40 million in matching private capital for commercialization. Initially, Inglis considered a total of \$100 million -- \$10 million in cash and \$90 million in federal matching funds.

Although he said he would rather have retained the higher prize amount, experts in the field seemed to think the mix of \$10 million in federal funding and \$40 million in matching private funds would be sufficient to cause inventors to get in the game.

During an earlier hearing on the legislation, Phillip Baxley, president of Shell Hydrogen, said that industry "can't do it all." He said, however, that his company would be interested in putting up private money to supplement federal funds.

Plans are for the grand prize to be awarded within the next 10 years. Smaller prizes of \$1 million for technical breakthroughs and \$4 million for prototypes will be awarded more often.

"Winning the grand prize not only confirms that the winner has technology that works but also technology that the market will support, not just something that will be put on a shelf," Inglis said. "The government's objective is not to hand out a prize for a science project" but to provide incentive for bringing a product to market.

The idea of hydrogen as a power source has been around since the 19th century. Part of the problem has been cost. It is expensive to separate hydrogen from water or hydrocarbons contained in other fuel.

When Inglis and researchers at South Carolina's research universities and the Greenville County school district announced plans to create such a prize, David Bodde, Clemson University's director of innovation and

public policy, said, "This H-Prize is a very interesting possibility" that could focus the attention and talents of researchers in a variety of fields on creating a hydrogen-fueled economy.

Bodde said South Carolina has a chance to become a major player in a hydrogen economy. But the state faces worldwide competition in the field.

Inglis said he expects the secretary of energy, with advice from experts in the field, to define specific criteria for awarding the prizes.
