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Inglis touts hydrogen at Mauldin town hall meeting
Engineers in crowd skeptical of congressman's energy policy

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U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis completed the last of three Upstate town hall meetings on Thursday night, speaking to about 60 people at the Mauldin library about his energy policy, which hinges primarily on the harvesting and use of hydrogen instead of oil.

America's need for a new source of energy stems from its dependence on the oil reserves in "unfriendly" Middle Eastern countries, Inglis said.

He noted a mailer distributed to the crowd that pictured the world's countries scaled according to their oil reserves. Saudi Arabia, the largest, was "on steroids," and both America and China -- the two top oil consumers -- were "teeny-weeny," Inglis said.

America needs to move toward a hydrogen economy, Inglis said, and he said national security depends on it.

Advertisement Inglis acknowledged that such a process was long-term and extensive. But Americans have overcome challenges before, he said, such as landing a man on the moon and constructing the transcontinental railroad and the Panama Canal.

Some citizens, however, doubted the emphasis placed on hydrogen and asked Inglis to consider electric cars or raising the gas tax first.

The most vocal opposition of the night came from several engineers in the crowd. Even if producing and using hydrogen could be made feasible, it wasn't efficient, they said.

"Almost any method for producing hydrogen costs more energy than it makes," said Joel Hall, an engineer at General Electric.

These methods were also "exorbitantly expensive and will ultimately fail," said Tim Atherley, an engineer at Siemens.

One engineer said the hydrogen issue was being used as a political tool to distract from other, more viable alternatives.

"I wish hydrogen would work. Unfortunately, I don't believe that it will," said engineer Bill Steiner. "It sounds good politically, but what I see is a political black hole."

If real change were to be made, Atherley said, it should be made by "a serious think tank of engineers" and not lawyers and politicians.

"I need scientists and engineers," Inglis countered. Hydrogen will "move from a science project to reality when the market starts driving it."
