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Other states want to tap local auto expertise

*Diverse officials from here, Tenn., discuss regional cooperation on high-tech research*

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Congressmen, university presidents and directors of national laboratories from South Carolina and Tennessee met in Greenville Monday to talk about collaborating on homeland security and automotive research as a way to develop the South's economy.

The all-day series of talks and panel discussions was sponsored by the Tennessee Valley Corridor, an economic development organization formed in 1995 by U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp of East Tennessee.

He created the organization to leverage research activities in four states -- Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky and Virginia -- into high-tech, high-paying jobs. The group met in South Carolina for the first time Monday because South Carolina has become the South's leader in advanced transportation research, Wamp said.

Also, he said, the Savannah River National Laboratory in Aiken is working with the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Oak Ridge, Tenn., on homeland security research.

**Advertisement** "We are going wherever the opportunities are, and this may evolve into a southern coalition, as opposed to the Tennessee Valley," Wamp said. "From the very start, it was designed to make the South more competitive."

Speakers during meetings at the Embassy Suites hotel and Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research included two university presidents: Jim Barker of Clemson and John Petersen of the University of Tennessee.

"I think it's a realization that the Southeast is emerging as a major force in automotive and transportation and that if we are to be successful we need to work together," Barker said.

Petersen used to be a professor and associate dean at Clemson, and the two university presidents said they know each other well.

"We're not competing, Tennessee versus South Carolina," Petersen said. "We're competing, U.S. versus the world."

Clemson and the University of Tennessee are members of a new consortium of seven Southeastern universities focused on automotive research. The Automotive Research Alliance also includes Auburn, Mississippi State and the universities of Alabama, Alabama at Birmingham and Kentucky. All of the schools are located in states with major auto plants.

The consortium is being coordinated by the National Transportation Research Center Inc. of Knoxville, Tenn., whose president, Benjamin J. Ritchey, was among the speakers at Monday's event. The Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the Tennessee Valley Authority are also involved in the consortium.

Speakers at Monday's event also included two U.S. Senators -- Jim DeMint of South Carolina and Jeff

Sessions of Alabama -- and three U.S. representatives: Wamp of Tennessee and Bob Inglis and Gresham Barrett of South Carolina.

The directors of two national laboratories -- Thomas E. Mason of Oak Ridge and G. Todd Wright of Savannah River -- also spoke, as did Peter Brown, editorial director and associate publisher of Automotive News, and Thomas C. Baloga, vice president of engineering for BMW North America.

Another speaker was Jason F. Jackson, director of emergency management for Wal-Mart Stores Inc.

The ICAR portion of the program was the first big event to be held at the graduate engineering center that Clemson is building at its Greenville research campus. Students in Clemson's new graduate school of automotive engineering were supposed to start classes in the engineering center this fall, but couldn't because construction wasn't finished. Classes are now scheduled to start there in January.

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