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'H-prize' set to highlight hydrogen research

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GREENVILLE -- A national competition centered on breakthroughs in hydrogen research and carrying prizes between \$1 million and \$100 million would launch next year, if an Upstate congressman can garner enough support for the idea in Washington.

The "H-Prize" would focus existing research and attract new players to a hydrogen economy -- a world where the colorless gas fuels automobiles and heats homes, for instance.

"It has to be a big deal," said U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C. "A little amount isn't going to do much.

"In order to get to that \$100 million level, we're going to need a lot of presidential lift. I'm not sure I've got that yet."

The legislation, which could be introduced into Congress next week, was unveiled Monday at Greenville's J.L. Mann High School.

J.L. Mann, a magnet school for science and technology, is about a mile from Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research.

"That's what's so exciting about science -- to see people really turned on to doing things with it," said David Bodde, Clemson's director of innovation and public policy.

An H-Prize would have several tiers, according to Inglis' proposed legislation.

Four \$1 million prizes would be awarded to advancements in hydrogen storage, production,

distribution and utilization. Another \$4 million would be awarded every other year to the best working prototype using that technology.

The \$100 million grand prize would go to the competitor that meets or exceeds criteria set by the Secretary of Energy.

Public and private dollars would fund the H-Prize. Under Inglis' legislation, \$5 million a year would be set aside for it, with up to \$1 million of that allowed for administration.

"It's not really about the money," Shell Hydrogen president Phillip Baxley said. "It's really about setting a prize, setting a target, setting aspirations. It's really allowing everyone to participate and everyone to compete."

Shell Hydrogen was one of about 30 interested parties from the energy, automotive and political sectors that met with Inglis in December to brainstorm a possible H-Prize. It's also a potential competitor.

Similar prizes have been used to spur advancement in entrepreneurial space flight and robotics.

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