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Adviser 'impressed' with ICAR

JASON SPENCER, Staff Writer

President Bush's top adviser on science and technology toured Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research on Tuesday, calling the project "very impressive" and an example of what this country needs to compete in the global economy.

"It's a good idea," said John Marburger, director of the president's office of Science and Technology Policy. "This partnership between industry and university needs to happen around the country."

Marburger's visit was as much about exposure as it was relationship-building, planting seeds so that when future requests for federal funding are evaluated those at the top have first-hand knowledge of what's going on here.

"We scored," said U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, whose office hosted the visit. "He was impressed, and takes back to Washington an understanding of some proficiencies that we have. And hopefully that'll help plant the thought that we are a player when it comes to the development of smart cars and fuels of the future."

During a presentation at BMW's Performance Center on Highway 101, Marburger used an iPod as an example of taking existing technology -- LCD screens and music compression, for instance -- and assembling them into a popular commodity. His comments centered on the American Competitiveness Initiative, which Bush proposed earlier this year.

As originally put forth, Bush called for \$50 billion to fund research and \$86 billion for research and development tax incentives. The initiative is currently working its way through Congress.

While no federal dollars were committed to ICAR on Tuesday -- none was expected -- Clemson will "aggressively pursue" such funding, said Chris Przirembel, the university's vice president for research and economic development.

Foreign oil

Marburger's visit was "not just exposing him to what resources we have, but also to trying to capture his imagination for urging the White House to pick up the cause of energy security," Inglis said.

During his speech, Inglis said he hoped Marburger could help convince Bush and Vice President

Dick Cheney that "This is your potential legacy: Moving us beyond this dependence on foreign oil, and moving us to an energy-secure future."

Afterward, Marburger said, "The administration's priorities are consistent with Inglis' ideas, but probably broader."

"The president gets it, and is clearly thinking along those lines," he said.

Inglis returned Friday from a 10-day trip to the Middle East, during which he visited Iraq, Israel and Sudan, among other countries. That trip reinforced his belief that alternative fuel sources should be paramount among this country's priorities, he said.

"They're connected," Inglis said. "It sends a signal to the Middle East that we may not be depending on you forever for this oil, and it sends the signal in the United States that we can have a brighter future. We don't have to pursue this nutty course of being dependent of such an unstable region of the world."

A contingent from Timken, Michelin, General Electric, Fluor and the Greenville County Schools gave brief presentations Tuesday.

Afterward, the politicians test-drove BMW M3s, which Marburger called "a lot of fun."

A world in motion

Most of the crowd Tuesday consisted of teachers and students, with fifth- and sixth-graders from Union County giving brief presentations on model cars and boats they built as part of the Society of Automotive Engineers International's A World in Motion program.

Twenty Greenville County schools and three in Union County participate in A World in Motion. In April, only one Spartanburg County school was involved in the program, which provides free materials to teachers: Landrum High. Since then, that number has grown to seven schools, and Byrnes High School is trying to get on board, too.

"It's very fun stuff," said Nathan Lanzetti, 15, a Byrnes student who won a national award earlier this year for computer-assisted design.

"Technology is the basis for everything nowadays. If you don't have technology skills, you can't get a job."

A World in Motion consists of four challenges that teach science and technology.

In April, Inglis piggybacked the announcement of legislation that would create federal incentives for hydrogen research onto the Society of Automotive Engineers International's addition of a fifth challenge, one in which students create model cars powered by hydrogen fuel cells.

Jason Spencer can be reached at 562-7214, or jason.spencer@shj.com.
