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S.C. leads hydrogen economy charge

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It might seem an odd position for a state some still consider part of the nation's backwater, but South Carolina is leading the charge into the hydrogen economy.

Much of the credit goes to two of the state's congressional leaders: U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis.

But S.C.'s ascendancy from hardly a blip on the hydrogen economy radar screen to national reputation is a true collaboration involving federal, regional, state and local efforts.

On Wednesday, the U.S. House overwhelmingly passed legislation Inglis introduced creating the "H-Prize."

"Momentum is gathering toward a national commitment to the hydrogen economy," the Greenville Republican said. "This is no science project. A hydrogen future is closer than we think."

Graham introduced identical legislation in the Senate on Thursday.

"Hydrogen holds tremendous promise for the future," the Seneca Republican said. "The H-Prize is a clear signal from the federal government that we are interested and believe in a hydrogen-based transportation economy. The H-Prize puts our money where our mouth is."

The bill would award:

- Four prizes of up to \$1 million each every two years for technological advancements in the

areas of hydrogen production, storage, distribution and utilization

- One prize of up to \$4 million every two years for working hydrogen prototype vehicles
- One grand prize of \$10 million for transformational technologies that enables hydrogen to become a widely used fuel

Inglis has pushed development of the hydrogen economy as a way to reduce the nation's dependency on foreign oil, create new jobs and clean the air.

He is chairman of the House Science Committee's research subcommittee and he is chairman of the Hydrogen and Fuel Caucus. Graham is co-chairman of the Senate Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Caucus.

Graham and Inglis, working with other members of the state's congressional delegation, also have helped shepherd the state's internal efforts.

During a meeting with state and local officials last year in Washington, Graham admonished them to come together on a plan to move the Hydrogen Economy forward in South Carolina.

The result has been a coordinated effort that has led to creation of:

- The S.C. Next Energy Initiative and the S.C. Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Economy Strategy
- The S.C. Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Alliance to coordinate initiatives around the state involving universities, government and the private sector
- The Center for Hydrogen Research, a 6,000-square-foot facility in Aiken designed for collaborative hydrogen research with Savannah River National Laboratory

Locally, the Greater Columbia Fuel Cell Challenge has been launched with the help of funding from the S.C. Research Authority to create a plan to make the region a center for fuel cell use.

Fuel cell companies and service providers have been invited to propose projects for the region.

All of those efforts build on top of the work being done at USC, which houses the National Science Foundation's only Industry/University Cooperative Research Center for Fuel Cells.

Evidence of South Carolina's ascendancy in the coming hydrogen economy came at the FuelCellSouth 2006 annual conference held in Columbia last month.

In its third year, the conference brought together many of the leading figures in the hydrogen economy.

Valri Lightner, fuel cell team leader for the U.S. Department of Energy; Bob Rose, executive director of the U.S. Fuel Cell Council; and Shannon Baxter-Clemmons, who is involved in the California Hydrogen Highway project, all spoke at the conference, along with a host of top fuel cell industry executives. Attendees came from as far away as Oregon.

The message was clear: South Carolina has gotten the attention of the hydrogen fuel cell

world.



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