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Rewarding research

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Prize would support hydrogen research.

Rep. Bob Inglis' proposal to encourage development of hydrogen-fuel technology by creating a government-funded prize is a potential long-term solution to the nation's dependence on foreign oil, and is an example of his commendable commitment to alternative fuels.

The H-prize would be modeled after the Ansari X Prize, a privately funded contest in which teams competed for a \$10 million prize for achieving space flight. The H-prize would reward development of a hydrogen-powered vehicle, as well as advances in storage and distribution of hydrogen fuel. The grand prize would be \$10 million from the federal government, plus up to \$40 million in private funds to match other private investment in the idea. Other prizes would be given for technological advancements and prototypes. The federal commitment seems reasonable given the potential payoff.

Critics say the potential reward for developing the technology is incentive enough. Inglis admits "the market is the prize," but said federal involvement is justified because ending dependence on foreign oil is a national security priority. Inglis compares the H-prize to the Manhattan Project, which led to the atomic bomb.

Advertisement The idea received committee support and will be considered by the full House this week. This is a creative idea that deserves consideration in conjunction with shorter-term solutions such as seeking more domestic oil supplies and encouraging Americans to use less fuel.

In the long term, it is critical to end our dependence on foreign oil; alternative fuels are key to that. There is reason to believe an H Prize would encourage research -- more minds on a problem makes a solution easier.
