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House passes hydrogen research competition bill
Proposal by Inglis, two others approved on 416-6 vote

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By Elyn Ferguson

WASHINGTON -- Fueled by constituent cries that Congress do something about energy, the House approved a proposal Wednesday by Rep. Bob Inglis that would create taxpayer-funded prizes to spur scientific competition to make hydrogen a feasible alternative to oil.

Lawmakers voted 416-6 to pass the H-Prize Act of 2006 by Inglis, R-Travelers Rest, and Daniel Lipinski, D-Ill. Rep. Judy Biggert, R-Ill., a Science Committee colleague of Inglis' who has said she doesn't see a need for federal prizes, voted present.

South Carolina is home to the Savannah River Site, where research is being done on hydrogen storage. The state is also home to Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research, which is exploring new fuels and new car designs. The center could benefit from advances in hydrogen technology. State leaders hope to build a 21st-century economy on energy from hydrogen and nuclear sources.

The bill would award:

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- \$20 million for technological advancements. Four \$1 million prizes would be given every two years.
 - \$20 million for working hydrogen-fueled cars or other vehicle prototypes. One prize of up to \$4 million would be given every two years.
 - \$10 million plus an additional mix of federal and private money to match investment dollars for a breakthrough discovery that transforms hydrogen from a limited-use fuel to a widely used one. This would be a single grand prize.


Inglis, Lipinski and Science Committee chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., said the bill would stir scientific competition to overcome the production costs, storage issues and distribution problems that now make hydrogen impractical for large-scale commercial use. Scientists and engineers have pursued hydrogen as a fuel since the 19th century.

Rep. Gresham Barrett, R-Westminster, said Inglis had struck a balance between government and the private sector with the bill.

Inglis said a breakthrough in hydrogen would provide the nation with a nonpolluting fuel that could lead to a technological and economic boon.

The Senate is the next step in the drive to make the H-Prize a reality.

Today, Sen. Lindsey Graham and Inglis plan a press conference to put the spotlight on Graham's Senate version of the Inglis-Lipinski bill. The Graham bill will be identical to the House proposal.

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Like Inglis, Graham is a big booster of hydrogen.
