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Graham introduces bill for H-Prize in Senate

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The "H-Prize," an incentive to accelerate development of hydrogen fuel as an alternative to gasoline, edged closer to reality Thursday as Sen. Lindsey Graham introduced legislation authorizing the award, one day after a similar bill sailed through the U.S. House.

The measure, co-sponsored by Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-North Dakota, would provide \$10 million in federal funding for a grand prize rewarding innovators who develop an affordable hydrogen vehicle. Several \$1 million prizes would be awarded every two years for smaller achievements in hydrogen research.

Another South Carolina Republican, Rep. Bob Inglis, authored the nearly identical bill approved by the House.

Advancing a "hydrogen economy" would create more jobs in South Carolina, Graham said.

The University of South Carolina is developing hydrogen fuel cells, while Clemson University is pushing forward on hydrogen vehicles.

Graham set up a "hydrogen caucus" in the Senate to promote the research and development of hydrogen fuel cells.

"It would be irresponsible if 50 years from now, we're still reliant on Middle Eastern oil to drive our national economy," Graham said.

The H-Prize has a 10-year deadline; if no one makes a significant breakthrough, it will expire.

"Hydrogen, to me, is an in-place, almost-there solution," Graham said.

Don MacKenzie, a vehicle engineer with the Union for Concerned Scientists, disagrees. He estimates the challenges of producing and storing hydrogen would take more than 20 years to solve, if not longer.

MacKenzie said Congress needs to focus more on adapting conventional cars to be more fuel efficient and less on long-term solutions like hydrogen.

"Where is the guarantee we are going to get this technology?" MacKenzie said. "Thirty years ago, General Motors said we would have cars running on gas turbine engines -- it never happened."

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