Leaders want to reach black community

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FLORENCE — Community leaders gathered at the Clemson Pee Dee Research Center on Wednesday to extol the need for engaging the black community in discussions regarding climate change throughout the nation.

S.C. Majority Whip Jim Clyburn said he hopes to encourage black men and women to become involved in the discussion of climate change so they know what is going on in their backyards.

“We’ve got to think about our environment,” he said. “We’ve got to think about our national security. We’ve got to think about new, green economies, and we’ve got to get serious about pursuing all of them.”

Rep. Terry Alexander also was in attendance to discuss the issue and to support Clyburn’s efforts to engage the black community in the issue of climate change. Although he supports the proposed Santee Cooper coal plant, Alexander said he thinks climate change is one subject everyone can agree needs to happen in the future.

“Climate change doesn’t mean that I’m anti-coal,” he said. “Climate change is a movement, as I see it. And I think that’s what Congressman Clyburn was talking about.”

He said the real issue Wednesday was getting the message out that the black community needs to take an interest in the issue since it affects their well-being.

“Climate change basically talks about the whole gamut of energy,” Alexander said. “Not one against the other, but what is best for our economy, our health, and the growth and development of this country.”

Dr. Jim Frederick, one of the event’s organizers, said paying attention to climate change can be beneficial to everyone, from farmers to people living in the city.

“T’m happy to have the congressman come here and talk about these issues,” he said. “Everybody is saying that fuel crops are taking away from food crops but that’s really not the case.”

Nancy Cave, Northcoast Office director for the Coastal Conservation League, said she is glad to see community leaders standing up for the change they hope to see in their districts.

“We’ve certainly been working in the African American community to educate them on the health impacts of the proposed coal plant,” she said. “We feel strongly that the African American community will be most effective because the plant is to be located in a very rural area with a significant African American population.”

Carolyn Schretmann-Jebeally, project director of climate change and sustainability for the Conservation Voters of South Carolina, said she thinks this is just the beginning of a movement toward a more ecologically minded public.

“We are on the cusp of a revolution of the way we are going to make and use energy for the next decade, and this is just a start on how to get people engaged in the whole process,” she said.

Morning News staff writer Kevin Smetana contributed to this report.