

Program seeks 20 percent increase in efficiency - creating jobs, saving homeowners money and combating climate change

Rep. Peter Welch announced a national energy efficiency initiative Monday that would retrofit millions of homes and commercial buildings and seek a 20 percent increase in efficiency.

The national program builds on Vermont's international leadership in energy efficiency.

At a recently retrofitted Burlington home, Welch outlined a bill he will introduce later this week that would provide financial incentives to homeowners and businesses to reduce their energy use and save them money. The Retrofit for Energy and Environmental Performance (REEP) program would fund state and municipal investments of up to half the cost of retrofitting the nation's existing homes and buildings, which account for 10 percent of global carbon emissions.

"Investing in energy efficiency is a practical, commonsense strategy to create jobs, save on energy costs and do our part to fight climate change," Welch said. "Families and business owners want to save energy and money. This program will give them the resources they need to invest in their homes, businesses and future."

Welch's bill would direct the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency to develop guidelines and manage financing for the national energy efficiency program. Homeowners and businesses could qualify for direct cash incentives, interest rate subsidies and credit support based on the percentage increase in energy efficiency they achieve:

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- Homeowners could qualify for \$1,000-\$3,000 in financial incentives for achieving a 10-20 percent increase in efficiency, with another \$150 for every additional percentage point of energy savings achieved
- Businesses could qualify for \$0.15 per square foot for the first 20 to 30 percent increase in efficiency with an increasing incentive of up to \$2.50 per square foot for energy reductions over 50 percent
- Incentives for both homes and commercial buildings would be capped at 50 percent of the cost of the retrofit

Funding for the program would go to the states through the existing State Energy Program formula, which has a built-in small state minimum, and provides additional financial incentives to states with high-performing programs.

Welch made the announcement at the Burlington home of Jason Van Driesche and Susan Munkres, who recently cut their energy bills by \$1,300 a year after retrofitting their house.

Welch, a member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, was joined at the press conference by Jim Presswood of the Natural Resources Defense Council, Michael Rogers of GreenHomes America and Blair Hamilton of Efficiency Vermont.

"Improving the efficiency of our homes and buildings is the cheapest, fastest, and easiest way to save energy and money," said Presswood, Federal Energy Policy Director for the NRDC. "Congressman Welch has quickly become a leader in Washington on combating global warming. His efforts to improve our nation's efficiency will reduce our dependence on dirty fuels, create local jobs, and save people money on energy bills from Vermont to California."

Rogers, Senior Vice President of GreenHomes America, the country's largest home performance contracting company, said the Welch program would create tens of thousands of jobs nationwide.

"This bill will create jobs right here in Vermont. We retrofit houses every day, and we know that for every dozen homes we improve, we create a job at our company," Rogers said. "The bill that Congressman Welch is introducing can help us and companies like us fix thousands of homes a year in Vermont and create hundreds of jobs right here in this state."

Hamilton, Director of Efficiency Vermont, said that Welch's program would lower the cost of home efficiency improvements to a level that would make them a sound investment.

"With federal grants proposed by Congressman Welch, together with proposed Efficiency Vermont incentives, the homeowner cost of a major, 25 percent energy upgrade could be cut in half, making it a very attractive option for many Vermonters," Hamilton said.

The state of Vermont recently adopted a goal to improve energy efficiency of homes in the state by 20 percent by 2017.

"A 20 percent increase in energy efficiency is doable and it's a goal that should be adopted throughout this country," added Welch.