

Rep. Peter Welch supported and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce passed historic health care reform legislation Friday night by a vote of 31 to 28.

America's Affordable Health Choices Act (H.R. 3200) will expand health insurance access to 37 million Americans, rein in unsustainably escalating health care costs and ensure long-overdue insurance reforms. The bill increases patient choice by creating a public health insurance option, which will reduce costs through competition with private insurers.

The legislation bans discrimination for preexisting conditions, eliminates co-pays and deductibles for preventative care and creates an annual cap on out-of-pocket expenses. It reduces health care costs by rewarding the quality - not quantity - of care, eliminating waste and fraud, and promoting prevention and wellness programs.

"Tonight we took an important step forward in our effort to provide quality, affordable health care to all Americans. By expanding access, reducing costs and reforming delivery, we will make our nation healthier and stronger," Welch said. "While this bill is far from perfect, I believe it takes us in the right direction. I look forward to improving it further as it advances through the legislative process by continuing to reduce costs and strengthening the public health insurance option."

H.R. 3200 includes several provisions and amendments advocated by Welch - many of which were informed by Vermont's progressive record of expanding access and controlling costs. Welch successfully included the following in the bill approved by the committee Friday night:

- **Prescription Drug Price Negotiation for Seniors** - Amendment requires the federal government to negotiate Medicare Part D drug prices directly with pharmaceutical companies, cutting prescription drug costs for seniors.

- **Preservation of Vermont's Medicaid Waiver** - Amendment allows Vermont's Medicaid waiver to continue under new system.

- **Promotion of Accountable Care Organizations** - Welch provision based on research by the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy creates ACOs, which reward the quality and efficiency of care, rather than the volume and intensity of services.

- **Blueprint for Health** - Welch provision based on Vermont model promotes patient-centered medical homes which compensate primary care providers for managing and coordinating their patient's care.

- **Public Option** - Welch provision creates public health insurance option to compete with private insurers, providing additional choices for consumers and driving down health costs by facilitating competition.

Energy and Commerce was the last of three House committees to approve H.R. 3200. The bill is expected to reach the House floor in September.