

Rep. Peter Welch on Tuesday announced that his Military Transition Program (MTP) Act, which provides job training to veterans, will be voted on by the U.S. House this week.

During a press conference at Burlington International Airport just before returning to Washington for the vote, Welch was joined by veterans advocates and business owners in highlighting the importance of creating job training opportunities for soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq.

"As veterans return to Vermont from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they confront a host of challenges, not least of which is securing employment. It is absolutely critical that we provide job training programs to veterans when they complete their service and ensure that those who serve our country have employment opportunities," Welch said.

During the press conference, Welch also announced he will be holding discussions with veterans, business owners and military officials in the coming months to discuss how to increase opportunities for returning members of the Vermont National Guard.

Welch's legislation creates a pilot program that for five years provides financial support to businesses to train and hire up to 500 unemployed or underemployed veterans a year who do not otherwise qualify for training programs. Administered by the Department of Labor in coordination with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, MTP would defray the costs of employment by providing up to 50 percent of a veteran's wages during training.

To qualify for the program, a veteran must be separated from the military and unemployed or paid less than 150 percent of the federal minimum wage.

The legislation, first introduced in 2008 with Rep. John Boozman (R-Ark), would reestablish a successful program implemented in the 1990s to cope with force reductions. This year it was incorporated into a broader veterans bill (H.R. 6231) and, earlier this month, was passed by the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Joining Welch for the event were representatives from businesses and organizations that employ veterans through the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program, including Champlain College Director of Workforce Training Melissa Hersh and People's United Bank Human Resources Manager Sarah Jones. Ed Laviletta, National Legislative Officer of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Vermont, also took part.

A vote on H.R. 6231 is expected Wednesday or Thursday.