

[Shay Totten, Seven Days](#)

Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT) on Wednesday was named one of ten "chief deputy whips" by Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD).

Welch said he is the only of his class — 2006 — to hold one of these key leadership posts, which come with no additional staff or resources but a seat at the leadership table as the caucus sets its priorities for the 112th Congress.

Other chief deputy whips include: Reps. Maxine Waters (D-CA), Ed Pastor (D-AZ), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Joseph Crowley (D-NY), Diana DeGette (D-CO), G. K. Butterfield (D-NC), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) and Jim Matheson (D-UT). Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) was named senior chief deputy whip.

Welch said he welcomes the challenge, and opportunity, of helping Democrats shape their agenda. In recent weeks, Welch has appeared on numerous national TV shows as a leading voice of opposition to the Republicans' effort to repeal last year's health care reform law. Instead of repeal, Welch urged the GOP to work with Democrats to fix parts of the bill that may not be working, rather than trying to repeal the whole bill.

"The big challenge in a legislative body is to create consensus and come up with ways to find practical solutions to our problems, and I see this as a chance to bring our caucus together with practical approaches to the issues at hand," said Welch.

Welch's movement into a leadership position in only his third term is the result of two key factors, notes University of Vermont political science professor Garrison Nelson, an expert on the inner workings of Congress.

"He was a legislative leader in Vermont and historically people who come to the Congress, and particularly to the House, and have prior leadership, are more likely to be considered for these

types of posts because they know what the job entails," said Nelson. "Also, he is a member of the Progressive Caucus and the Progressive Caucus did very well in the last election — 95 percent of them were reelected while only half of the Blue Dogs were elected. So, ideologically that he is aligned with the most powerful of the caucuses gives him a leg up."

Welch, too, has played the role of matchmaker in Congress.

During the previous session of Congress, Welch brought Democrats from coal districts together with environmentalists over dinner at his DC apartment to help work out issues so they could all support energy legislation. As part of that legislation, Welch introduced HomeStar, otherwise dubbed "Cash for Caulkers," and was able to win Republicans to support.

"It's a function of working, listening and having a practical way of proceeding," Welch told Seven Days. "The appointment of chief deputy whip gives me more running room to play that role."

He plans to reach out to both Democrats and Republicans in his leadership role as a way to advance better legislation.

"The Congress belongs to the American people, it doesn't belong to the Republican or Democratic parties or whomever is in the majority," said Welch. "We all have a common responsibility and that's to solve the problems that need to be solved for the American people."

During his days as Senate President Pro Tem in the Vermont Senate, Welch said he regularly reached across the aisle and advance Republican ideas, "because some of them made sense."

Minority Whip Hoyer said Welch will help the leadership shape its agenda.

"Rep. Welch has stood out as a leader in the Democratic Caucus during his four years in office, and he will be a strong addition to our team," said Hoyer in a statement. "He brings an important perspective to the table, and I look forward to working with him as we promote Democrats'

priorities of job creation and deficit reduction."

While Welch has been removed from the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, which has direct jurisdiction over health care, his leadership post will allow him to push for the waivers necessary to implement a single-payer system in Vermont, if lawmakers opt for that path.

"There are no guarantees in anything in Washington, but this will help," said Welch.

Welch was also appointed today to the Committee on Agriculture, whose jurisdiction includes farming, dairy, forestry, renewable energy, commodity exchanges, rural economic development, rural broadband access, rural health care, nutrition and water conservation, among other items. Welch is also co-chairman of the Congressional Dairy Caucus.

This year the Farm Bill is up for re-authorization, too, which will consume much of the committee's work.

Welch was also reappointed to a third term on the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, which is responsible for overseeing all operations of the executive branch of the federal government. Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) is the new chairman of that committee. Issa has promised to provide vigorous oversight of the Obama administration.

It's not yet clear if Welch will be reappointed to serve a term on the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, otherwise known as the House Ethics Committee.