

[By Anders Ax](#)



Rep. Peter Welch traveled to Rutland on Monday and outlined several priorities he will pursue in the upcoming session, including a proposal to help people make their homes more energy efficient.

The Democratic congressman, speaking at the future Green Mountain Power Energy Innovation Center at 68 Merchants Row, formerly the Eastman Building, proposed assisting owners of commercial buildings in making their facilities more energy efficient as well as the need to push the federal government in the same direction.

"That's kind of the approach that we ought to be taking much more of in Washington, and if we focus on something that's beautiful and important to do like energy efficiency, then we're (going to) really be better for it," Welch said.

In order to implement these initiatives, three pieces of legislation are vital, Welch said. First, the Home Owner Managing Energy Savings or HOMES act, would provide help to homeowners wishing to retrofit their homes for energy efficiency, he said.

Focusing on commercial buildings, Welch spoke of the need to reform the 179D Commercial Tax Credit.

"This is something that's really important to our building owners, especially the larger buildings, to invest in energy efficiency," Welch said. "Again, it's the jobs, it's the made in America manufacturing, it's the climate change benefits and saving money benefits."

Finally, Welch outlined Energy Saving Performance Contracts, which would allow the federal government and private sector to partner and implement energy efficient upgrades at no cost to the taxpayer.

Other speakers joined Welch, such as Mary Powell, CEO of Green Mountain Power Corporation, Jim Merriam, director of Efficiency Vermont at Vermont Investment Corporation, Ludy Biddle, Executive Director for NeighborWorks of Western Vermont, Jonathan Dancing, of Building Performance Professionals Association and Crispin White, a local homeowner and customer of NeighborWorks.

Powell said that the renovation of 68 Merchants Row will represent "a state-of-the-art example of how to create an energy-efficient, fossil fuel-free building." The building will also be the site of Green Mountain Power Innovation Center and also house NeighborWorks of Western Vermont H.E.A.T. squad and Efficiency Vermont.

Powell added that she had "no doubt" that the collaborations between the three groups on energy efficiency, renewable energy and smart technologies, will benefit the state.

Merriam said that Vermont is "one of the leading states in energy efficiency."

"We've saved enough energy to power Vermont homes for two years, which is an amazing accomplishment," he said.

Biddle provided some statistics on NeighborWorks success. So far, over 500 houses in Rutland County have had retrofits.

"There's no way this isn't the single best investment that we all have made," Dancing said. With the HOMES Act providing direct funding into the process and creating market stability and new customers, Dancing said, the benefit is "direct right to the street."

With the help of Efficiency Vermont incentives, White invested in newer insulation retrofits along the foundation and roof and furnace options to save money and enjoy a home that, for the first time in 30 years, "is the first time I have looked forward to winter."

Wrapping up the conference, Welch praised Vermont's attitude in recognizing challenges and banding together in groups to solve them.

Welch, a member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, will continue his tour in Montpelier later this week and as well as in stops Chittenden County where he will outline health care and telecommunication issues.