By Nicole Gaudiano, Burlington Free Press

Rep. Peter Welch has asked the Obama administration to create a national program for making homes more energy efficient.

In a letter Wednesday, the Vermont Democrat proposed using funds from this year's economic stimulus package to weatherize 5 million homes, a program he said would create up to 850,000 local jobs and save homeowners $3 billion per year on energy bills. The letter was signed by 44 other members of Congress.

"By investing in energy efficiency, we can create jobs that cannot be exported and provide a much-needed boost to our economy," Welch said in a statement.

His proposal is based on a provision he wrote in a climate change bill that passed the House this summer. The legislation is supported by a coalition of industry, trade, conservation and labor groups, he wrote.