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The Affordable Care Act and Vermont

The Affordable Care Act is making a difference in the lives of Vermonters. According to HealthCare.gov, as a result of reforms enacted three years ago, nearly 5,000 Vermonters under the age of 26 are receiving coverage under their parents' insurance plans, Vermonters on Medicare are saving \$11.7 million on prescription drugs, and 151,000 Vermonters are receiving free preventive care. Look for regular updates on implementation of the Affordable Care Act in this newsletter. [Click here](#) for more information on what the Affordable Care Act means for Vermont.

Welch returns to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey

Rep. Welch recently traveled to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey. During the trip, Rep. Welch met with foreign leaders, American diplomats, military commanders and U.S. soldiers. He focused on the progress toward ending the war in Afghanistan, the crisis in Syria and its impact on the region, including the related refugee crisis, as well as the use of U.S. drones in the region. [Click here to view photos](#) of Rep. Welch meeting with Vermont soldiers and other photos from the trip.

Fighting to Keep College Affordable

When Stafford Student Loan interest rates were set to double last year, Rep. Welch collected stories from Vermont students and families about the rising cost of college and explosion of student debt and [shared them on the House floor](#). Those stories played a crucial role in blocking the scheduled rate increase in 2012. Now another increase is set for July 1, and Rep. Welch is renewing his push to block it. Last month he [visited students in Rutland to hear what a doubling of interest rates would mean for them](#).

Lessons learned from Vermont businesses in the wake of Irene

This month Rep. Welch brought Small Business Administration (SBA) officials to Wilmington and Waterbury to hear from Vermont business owners who struggled to qualify for disaster assistance in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene. Last April, Rep. Welch [sent a letter to SBA Administrator Karen Mills](#) urging her to create a new loan program tailored to the unique needs of very small businesses like those in Vermont that are often unable to comply with federal paperwork burdens in the aftermath of a devastating disaster like Irene. "The critical challenge for small businesses is the immediate time after the event," said Rep. Welch. "If they can't get back into business very, very quickly the cash flow dries up, customers go away. One of the challenges we had with the SBA loans was the need to get a quick turnaround." [Read more.](#)

Helping dairy farmers secure a stable workforce

Rep. Welch is working across the aisle on a bipartisan bill to ensure Vermont dairy farmers have access to a stable workforce. The H-2A visa program allows businesses to hire foreign workers when domestic labor is unavailable. Although other sectors of agriculture currently have access to this program, dairy farmers do not. Welch's bill would expand the H-2A program to allow dairy farmers access to three-year visas that would better accommodate their workforce needs. "Vermont's dairy farmers are hanging on by their fingernails," said Rep. Welch. "Every day they struggle with multiple challenges to survival, including high energy costs, unstable milk prices, and a shortage of workers. This legislation will help take one challenge off their plates. With a bipartisan push to overhaul the nation's immigration system gaining momentum, there is a real opportunity to make progress on this important issue." [Read more.](#)

Demanding debate on climate change

Rep. Welch and 20 House colleagues are challenging Republican leaders to schedule debate on climate change. To date, House leaders have refused to engage in a dialogue about how to reduce emissions or prepare for the impact of climate change. In the 112th Congress, the House voted 53 times to block any action on climate change. "We can have honest disagreements over policy, but none of us can defend to our constituents having no debate at all. The scientific evidence is clear and persuasive: global warming is occurring, it is the result of human activity, and immediate steps are needed to reduce our nation's reliance on fossil fuels. It's well past time for a full, open and vigorous debate," Welch said. [Read more.](#)

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