

Welch proposes energy rebates

■ Congressman's bill would provide rebates for home efficiency projects linked to the amount of energy saved

By Joel Banner Baird
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Homeowners who make their dwellings more energy efficient would get rebates under a bill-in-progress, Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., said Monday in South Burlington.

Welch, the bill's author, said he anticipates bipartisan sponsorship and support for the measure because it offers help to homeowners as they face "a wicked burden" in heating bills, as well as benefiting local contractors and American manufacturers.

No new bureaucracy would be created by the bill, he said, and few if any of the building materials would need to be imported from overseas.

"The incentives would be homeowner-driven," Welch said. "The interests of the homeowner is consistent with the interests of the taxpayer."

Currently in its draft stages, the Home Owner Managing Energy Savings (HOMES) Act would allocate \$2 billion to provide \$2,000 rebates to homeowners who demonstrate a 20 percent energy savings. Another provision of the bill would award an additional \$1,000 rebate for every 5 percent in additional savings, up to a total of \$8,000 — or 50 percent of the project's total cost.

The congressman outlined the proposed bill at the 1950s-era home of Jeffrey Pascoe, who recently contracted with Williston-based Building Energy to add insulation to the residence.

Pascoe told visitors he took out a second mortgage to pay for the upgrades — but better-than-expected fuel-oil savings suggested a short pay-back period on the investment.

"I'm breaking even," he said.



BEAR CIERI, for the Free Press
Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., outlines legislation to create a nationwide efficiency program for homeowners at the South Burlington home of Jeffrey Pascoe on Monday. Pictured from left are George Twigg, Deputy Policy Director for Efficiency Vermont, Jeffrey Pascoe, Welch and Scott Gardner, the project's contractor.

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D-Vt.

The home feels warmer, and a reduction in neighborhood noise is an added bonus, Pascoe said.

That benefit comes as no surprise to Scott Gardner, founder and general manager of Building Energy.

Pascoe's home had 3 to 8 inches of pink fiberglass in the attic, and in some places, absolutely none, he said. Now, the home is using one-third less energy.

More broadly, "we're creating a new economy," Gardner said.

Gardner has been in the construction business for 30 years. Five years ago, three of his 30-person staff worked in the field of energy efficiency, he said. Now, he said, more than half his

workforce is re-insulating homes and businesses and conducting energy audits.

"The money that you're keeping in your pocket, and the carbon that we're saving, are having long-term impacts overall," Gardner said. "The biggest stumbling block is that it's fairly expensive."

The average cost of an efficiency retrofit in Vermont is about \$6,600, said Vermont Energy Investment Corp. Policy Director George Twigg, who attended Welch's news conference.

Twigg said Vermont currently offers up to \$2,500 in efficiency rebates, and more financial incentives likely would inspire more Ameri-

cans to embrace the upgrades.

"There's a lot more demand out there; there's a lot more potential; there are a lot more people who need to see their fuel bills go down — and saving that money and putting it to better uses," Twigg said.

Welch, a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee in the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives, said his bill has "a real shot at bipartisan support" because of its practical nature.

"We don't get into the argument about the source of fuel; we don't get into the argument about climate change," Welch said. "Everybody wants to save money on fuel bills."

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