

Rep. Peter Welch joined House Speaker Nancy Pelosi at an Earth Day news conference today recognizing the success of the Green the Capitol initiative and calling on lawmakers to further reduce their energy use. In its first 18 months, the initiative has reduced Congress' carbon emissions by 74 percent.

Shortly after taking office in 2007, Welch became the first Member of Congress to make his office carbon neutral and has since become a leader in the effort to create a 21 century energy policy. Welch, a vice chair and founding member of the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, was invited to the Earth Day event to speak about his success in reducing his office's carbon footprint.

"These are easy, practical steps we can all take," Welch said. "By doing our small part to reduce carbon emissions in our office, I'm hopeful we can set an example for others who want to reduce their energy costs and contribute to the fight against climate change."

Through the Green the Capitol program, the House has eliminated 91,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions by eliminating the use of coal for heating and cooling, acquiring renewable wind energy for its electricity needs and installing a comprehensive waste-reduction and composting operation in all campus cafeterias.

"When Rep. Welch became the first Member of Congress to make his office carbon neutral, he took an early lead in demonstrating what each of us can do to reduce our carbon footprint," Speaker Pelosi said. "As we celebrate the accomplishments of the first two years of the Green the Capitol initiative this Earth Day, I hope other Members of Congress will continue to follow Rep. Welch's lead."

In addition to greening his office, Welch introduced legislation last month designed to save energy and money by retrofitting the country's existing homes and businesses. The Retrofit for Energy and Environmental Performance (REEP) program would fund state and municipal investments of up to half the cost of energy retrofits. Homeowners and businesses could qualify for direct cash incentives, interest rate subsidies and credit support based on the percentage increase in energy efficiency they achieve.

Welch's REEP program was included in major climate change legislation introduced by House Energy and Commerce Chairmen Henry Waxman and Rep. Edward Markey last month.