

Authorizes an estimated \$15 million for Vermont school modernization

Washington, DC - Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT) voted for legislation last night to renovate and modernize public schools in Vermont and across the country, authorizing over \$15 million for modernization projects for Vermont schools.

The House-passed 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act, [H.R. 3021](#), authorizes \$6.4 billion for school renovation and modernization projects for fiscal year 2009.

Welch worked with several northeastern lawmakers to successfully amend the bill to allow funding for investments in renewable energy and heating systems for school buildings. The amendment specifies biomass, wind, solar, and geothermal.

Thirty-five Vermont schools have already converted to woodchip or wood pellet burners.

"Public education and school infrastructure is one of the most important investments we can make," said Welch. "In the face of our current energy challenges, providing funding for renewable energy and heating systems for our local schools is a win for taxpayers and a win for our environment. Many Vermont schools have successfully saved money and reduced their dependence on fossil fuel by converting to biomass."

The Vermont Superintendents Association reports that school districts across Vermont are expressing interest in exploring efficiency initiatives and moving away from fossil fuel to biomass.

In the 2006-2007 heating season, at a time when average fuel oil price were just \$2.27 per gallon, Vermont school districts saved approximately 59 percent of fuel costs by using wood chip systems, according to a recent study. In addition, approximately one million gallons of oil were saved through wood chip systems conversions.

"School districts across Vermont are eager to pursue renewable energy sources. Providing this federal funding for energy-related improvements will go a long way to supporting worthwhile initiatives in Vermont schools across the state," said Norm Etkind of the Vermont Superintendents Association School Energy Management Program.

Welch worked with Reps. Carol Shea-Porter, Michael Arcuri, and Paul Hodes on the amendment.

In the recently-passed Farm Bill, Welch sponsored an amendment that creates a Community Wood Energy Program. This program will provide matching funds for state and local governments to convert public buildings, such as schools, libraries, and town halls to wood biomass heating or power systems.