

*Wage hike will give workers a long-overdue raise, levels playing-field with Vermont*

Washington, DC - Rep. Peter Welch issued the following statement in anticipation of the first increase in the minimum wage in a decade on Tuesday.

Before the U.S. House passed The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007, H.R. 2, on January 10, Congress hadn't voted for a raise in the minimum wage since 1995. The 70 cent raise on Tuesday from \$5.15 will be followed by two 70 cent increases in July 2008 and July 2009. An estimated 13 million workers will benefit from the legislation. Today, a full-time minimum wage worker earns just \$10,712 annually, more than \$2,000 *below* poverty for a family of two. Congress also included tax cuts for small businesses with the increase in the minimum wage.

"Tuesday's increase in the minimum wage gives a long-overdue raise for hard-working Americans. Stemming from our values of both self-reliance and a sense of community, it is no accident that in Vermont we have led in the effort to reward work with a reasonable minimum wage above the national minimum. Tuesday's raise in the minimum wage will help level the playing-field with more than 20 state's like Vermont that have respected workers by establishing fairer wages.

"Today, the average American CEO earns more before lunchtime in a single day than a minimum wage worker earns in an entire year. And after an entire year of work, this minimum wage worker with just one dependent finds his or her family in poverty. That is simply wrong. We must reward work and make work pay.

"This raise in the minimum wage reflects the new priorities in Washington and a Congress willing to make long-overdue progress for working Americans again. For an entire decade under the previous leadership in Congress workers couldn't even get a vote on the minimum wage. But today, from restoring a check and balance on this President to raising wages for hard working Americans, we are making the bipartisan progress Vermonters and Americans expect."