

Successfully amends legislation with Sen. Sanders' higher education energy and efficiency initiative

Washington, DC - Rep. Peter Welch, who became the only carbon-neutral congressional office in February, successfully included a carbon offsets program in comprehensive energy legislation which passed the House this evening.

The legislation permits executive agencies to account for their global warming emissions through the purchase of qualified greenhouse gas offsets or renewable energy certificates. The legislation also establishes a definition for quality offsets for the new industry.

"Our federal government is one of the leading contributors to global warming. This initiative allows federal agencies to lead by example in cutting carbon emissions," said Welch.

The broader legislation sets the goal of requiring federal government operations be carbon-neutral by 2050 and establishes annual government emissions reductions targets.

The legislation also establishes an essential definition of quality offsets: that they be "real, additional, verifiable, enforceable, and permanent," to assure the offsets reduce green house gas emissions. This definition will help standardize this rapidly growing industry, which is providing critical support to new biomass, wind, methane, solar, and other renewable energy projects around the country.

The pilot will last through 2010 and requires the Comptroller General of the United States to evaluate the pilot program and issue a report by April 2011.

Welch was also successful in amending the legislation to establish a grant program to support energy sustainability and energy efficiency on college and university campuses. This program is identical to one championed by Sen. Bernie Sanders in the U.S. Senate's energy legislation.

The New Direction for Energy Independence, National Security and Consumer Protection Act, H.R. 3220, passed 241 to 172.

In addition to Welch's initiative, the legislation also includes:

- Affirmation that the United States should re-engage and lead the effort to reach a global warming agreement that requires binding emissions reduction from the world's major emitters, including China and India;
- New energy and fuel efficiency initiatives including appliance efficiency standards, grants for local efficiency programs, and incentives for businesses to pursue efficiency; and
- Incentives for renewable energy development, including biomass research and development.

"This comprehensive energy reform is a huge step forward, but even more aggressive action is needed," said Welch. Welch supports raising automobile mileage standards to 35 mpg or above, which he is hopeful will be included in conference with the Senate.

Carbon Neutrality Initiative Background:

In February, Welch launched an initiative to make his congressional offices in Vermont and Washington carbon neutral by working to reduce energy use and offsetting his office's carbon emissions. Welch offset the greenhouse gas emissions related to his office activities so they will not contribute to global warming. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has since launched an initiative to make the entire U.S. Capitol Complex carbon neutral by aggressively improving efficiency, using renewable energy, and purchasing carbon offsets.