

Burlington, VT - Representatives for Vermont's children, seniors, and physicians joined Rep. Peter Welch today to highlight major health care legislation which passed the U.S. House and U.S. Senate last week.

Welch held the press conference at the Community Health Center of Burlington after touring the center as part of National Health Center Week.

The House reauthorized the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act last week, providing health care to an additional 5 million low-income children, preventing a pending cut in reimbursements for physicians, and expanding access to prescription drugs and prevention services for seniors.

"Congress is following Vermont's lead by taking a significant step towards ensuring that every single child in America has health care," said Welch. "We stop in its tracks yet another attempt by the federal government to shift the cost of Medicare to health care providers. And we expand Medicare services for senior citizens while eliminating Medicare overpayments to insurance companies."

The legislation reauthorizing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which currently covers 6 million children, expands health care coverage to 5 million additional low-income children. During the course of the year, between 6,000 and 6,500 Vermont children receive support from the current program. The CHAMP Act provides essential funding for the state to reach an estimated 3,200 additional uninsured Vermont children in families with incomes under 200 percent of federal poverty level who remain uninsured.

In addition, the bill prevents a scheduled 10 percent fee reimbursement cut in 2008 and 5 percent cut in 2009 to Vermont physicians who treat seniors and patients with disabilities. Vermont physicians would lose an estimated \$20 million in these two years from these cuts. Instead, under the bill, physicians receive a .5 percent increase in each of these two years, providing the reimbursement stability necessary to ensure Medicare patients can continue to see the doctor of their choice.

The fiscally responsible legislation also ends indefensible overpayments to private insurance companies under the Medicare Advantage plan. The Congressional Budget Office and the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) have reported that these companies are overpaid an average of 12 percent more than the cost of care under traditional Medicare, with some plans receiving a 50 percent windfall.

The crack-down on over-payments to insurance companies will prevent future Medicare premium increases and extend the solvency of the Medicare Part A program by two years. Vermont has over 100,000 Medicare recipients.

For seniors, the bill eliminates barriers to low income seniors participating in the Medicare drug program and makes a series of preventative screenings free for Medicare beneficiaries. New free benefits under Medicare provided under the CHAMP Act include:

- diabetes screening tests
- screening for glaucoma
- an initial preventive physical examination
- bone mass measurement
- prostate cancer screening tests
- colorectal cancer screening tests
- mammography screening
- pap smear screening

"This bill reflects the changed priorities of this new Congress. Children, senior citizens, and hard-working American taxpayers will be better off because of this important initiative," Welch added.

The bill, [H.R. 3162](#), passed last week in a vote of 225 to 204. The Senate passed similar, but less expansive legislation, which will require going to a conference committee.