

*Legislation supports economic growth in Vermont's Caledonia, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Orleans Counties*

Washington, D.C. - Legislation co-authored by Rep. Peter Welch to boost economic development opportunities in northern Vermont passed the U.S. House today, 264 to 154.

The legislation, which was included in the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007, H.R. 3246, establishes a new Northern Border Economic Development Commission.

The Commission is made up of the most economically distressed border areas of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine and it includes Vermont's Caledonia, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Orleans Counties.

"This legislation recognizes the unique economic development challenges faced by our northern-most counties. This Commission will provide the resources necessary to help our local communities improve economic prosperity and create new jobs in Vermont's most rural regions," said Welch.

The Commission will be authorized to invest \$40 million per year- increasing to \$60 million per year by 2012- for economic development and job creation grants to state and local governments, local development districts, and nonprofit organizations.

The goal of the legislation is to ensure that the most economically challenged regions in the country have the tools to develop the basic building blocks for economic development, such as transportation and public infrastructure, job skills training, and business development.

This spring, Welch testified before House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure in support of creating a development commission specifically for the northeast.

The Commission will support existing local economic development organizations to ensure that federal support reflects both local needs and regional economic development goals.

Welch added that "the Northern Border Economic Development Commission has enormous potential to help meet a range of local needs," including funding transportation infrastructure, broadband development, alternative energy projects, agricultural development, land and forestry conservation to maintain productive traditional uses, and health care facilities, among others.

The Commission will be made up of the governors of each state or his/her designee and grants will be awarded based on merit.

The legislation was supported by a bipartisan group of congressmen from the northeastern border region, including Reps. Mike Michaud (D-ME), Paul Hodes (D-NH), Michael Arcuri (D-NY), John McHugh (R-NY), and Tom Allen (D-ME), who were original co-sponsors with Welch.