

[By Christian Avard](#)

Vermont's congressman is hoping the Vermont way can restore trust in Washington and help local businesses compete with Internet vendors.

Rep. Peter Welch told Springfield Rotarians on Monday that gridlock continues on Capitol Hill. Republicans and Democrats are gearing up for the 113th session of the U.S. Congress next month and finding common ground is taking a back seat to partisan bickering.

"In Vermont you get to know the people you're working with, even those you disagree with, and develop an appreciation that their goals are the same as yours. It creates a cohesion and good will to find the common ground. That's what's eluding us in Congress," Welch said.

According to Welch, the Vermont way is about focusing on legislative solutions as opposed to winning ideological battles. Last session Welch reached common ground with Republicans to help Vermont businesses.

Welch and several colleagues introduced the Main Street Fairness Act, a bill that allows local retailers to compete with tax-free Internet vendors. Welch said Main Street retailers are at a competitive disadvantage and the bill would give a boost to small retailers.

The Main Street Fairness Act has yet to pass but the bill is gaining bipartisan support. Welch believes the progress represents a positive sign for further cooperation between Republicans and Democrats next legislative session.

"I'm working with a conservative Republican from Arkansas, Rep. Steve Womack. I asked what was the message your voters gave to you? They said, 'Steve get together with colleagues and get something done.' I said I hear the same. It gives me hope in this new congress, that Republicans and Democrats will hear more of that and create the good will required to find common ground and make progress," Welch said.

Bob Flint, Springfield Regional Development Corporation Executive Director, said Welch's efforts can make a difference in the local economy, if the bill is passed.

"Retail in downtowns or anywhere in a border town in Vermont is challenging because of the proximity to New Hampshire, with no sales tax. Add the Internet sales to it and you make for a very difficult situation. Congressman Welch's bill would help to remedy the latter and make for a more even playing field," Flint said.

Leaders in Washington will be put to the test in the coming weeks as President Barack Obama and Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner of Ohio deal with the ramifications of the so-called "fiscal cliff." If Republicans and Democrats cannot come to an agreement on budget and tax issues by Jan. 1, then tax rates will increase and discretionary spending cuts will go into effect.

Many programs that rely on federal dollars, such as medical care and economic development and social programs, will be negatively impacted. Welch said it's "not the end of the world" if an agreement is not reached, but he is optimistic there will be one.

"The speaker wants to make an agreement and I know the president wants to make a balanced agreement as well. The most important thing is we get one that has a serious revenue component and we start making, on the cuts side, sensible military decisions about what is required for national security as opposed to doing everything for everybody everywhere," Welch said.

Up to 40 Rotarians attended the event at the Hartness House Inn in Springfield.