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Washington, DC -- Representative Peter Welch delivered his first speech on the House floor today for the House Committee on Rules.

Welch made his remarks on restoring civility to the U.S. House in order to meet the legislative challenges faced by Congress.

Applying his experience as a Vermont legislator, Welch noted that "the rules we propose for your consideration are basic; they are rules that apply to legislators in Vermont and probably rules many of your own state legislators take for granted," he said.

"Together, we have a lot of work to do... Our obligation is to do everything we can to move our country forward by confronting directly the challenges before us... These rules - applying to all - will help us all do the work of the people we represent," Welch added.

Restoring Civility to the U.S. House - Representative Peter Welch

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Together, we have a lot of work to do - to help working families get ahead, to restore America's standing in the world, and to bring our budget back in balance. Making progress is what our constituents in the 435 districts around the country have elected us to do.

To be sure, our differences will be intensely debated. However, our obligation is to do

everything we can to move our country forward by confronting directly the challenges before us. To succeed in the job our constituents sent us here to do, we must lay out rules and a regular order that members can count on. These ground rules will not guarantee any outcome, but will set out a framework where we as an institution make progress and serve the public.

That is why the Democratic leadership embraces three principles that will help us succeed. As the Member from California has laid out, we set out today to establish a regular civility in this body.

Civility - mutual respect, really - requires straightforward ground rules to guide debate; it requires adherence to rules that apply to all. Each of us will know and be able to assure the citizens who elected us that when it comes to votes in this, their representative body:

- Members will have time to read what they are voting on;
- Members will have time to vote, but votes will not be held open for the purpose of changing the outcome; and
- Votes on conference reports will be on the one agreed to by the conferees, not one altered after the fact.

These rules - applying to all - will help us all do the work of the people we represent.

Our debates at times will be intense, as they should be, but we must strive to have our debates on merit. The rules we propose for your consideration are basic; they are rules that apply to legislators in Vermont and probably rules many of your own state legislators take for granted - time to read and review before voting, a timely voting procedure, considering conference reports as signed.

I served thirteen years in the Vermont legislature - sometimes in the minority, other times in the majority. We in Vermont were proud of the legislative process and standards we set. Those in the majority didn't do things simply because they could - minority voices were heard, members were kept informed, and our legislative process was respected. We had intense debates - on the issues - but more often than not, at the end of the day, good ideas were considered and were able to move Vermont ahead.

These changes for your consideration are not just about process, but about passing good, substantive legislation.

These new rules to establish civility in this body are essential for Congress to do the work of the American people and build the trust of those we serve.

We face a looming challenge in America - to the security of our families and to the security of our country. And nobody and no party has a monopoly on the good ideas required to steer us forward. These simple and straightforward rules of engagement will help us do that.

Yesterday, the Minority Leader, in handing over the gavel to our new Speaker, was graceful and wise when he reminded us that we can have disagreements without being disagreeable. And both the Speaker and Minority Leader stated on our behalf what we all know to be true: all of us are here for a common purpose, to make America a better place. There is and must be room for all our voices to be heard to achieve our common purpose.

The rules we propose will help us do that. How? By establishing clear ground rules that apply to all: the majority as well as the minority; to every Member, committee chair and Ranking member; House veteran and House freshman - one and all alike.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.