

Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) sharply questioned oil company executives about the billions of dollars in tax breaks the industry enjoys during a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing Tuesday.

Addressing top executives of BP, ExxonMobil, Chevron, ConocoPhillips and Shell Oil, Welch asked whether profitable industries like theirs should continue to enjoy taxpayer-funded subsidies.

"The question really is: should taxpayers of the United States continue to provide billions of dollars in subsidies to an industry – the oil industry – that's mature; to an industry that's extremely profitable; and to an industry that's based on a carbon-based fuel? Or, is it time finally for the taxpayer incentives that are being steered to the oil industry to be redirected to efforts to develop a 21st century clean energy economy?" Welch asked the witnesses.

Responding to Welch's questions, ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson, Chevron CEO John Watson and Shell President Marvin Odum each said they supported the continuation of fossil fuel subsidies.

"I believe in tax incentives, but I question whether they should go to mature industries and industries that are profitable," Welch continued. "They've managed to get their sea legs, and now your industry enjoys profits of \$68 billion."

Watch this exchange:

Earlier at Tuesday's hearing, Welch announced a new letter he wrote to BP CEO Tony Hayward calling on the company to divert dividend payments to an escrow account that would fund the cleanup and compensation costs of the Deepwater Horizon spill. Thirty-two other House members signed on to Welch's letter.

Watch Welch's opening statement: