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(Host) This is a critical week for budget negotiations in Washington. Republican and Democratic leaders still have not reached a compromise for spending through the end of this fiscal year.

And Congressman Peter Welch says he worries that the differences could lead to a government shutdown.

VPR's Bob Kinzel reports.

(Kinzel) This Friday, a continuing resolution that funds the operations of the federal government will expire. Congressman Welch has supported two previous temporary budget resolutions, and he says he's prepared to vote for a third.

House Democratic leaders have offered to cut spending in the current fiscal year by \$33 billion. But some Republicans are seeking \$61 billion in reductions.

Welch says the key to this fight is how the Republican caucus resolves this difference.

(Welch) "We should not be heading toward a government shutdown. But that unfortunately is the distinct possibility. We have a tough budget here, but the real question is whether we're going to see it as practical problem that we have to solve, or is it an ideological battle that people feel they have to win. And it's too much of the latter right now."

(Kinzel) Welch says the target goal of \$33 billion in cuts is achievable if negotiators are willing to look beyond what's known as the "discretionary" portion of the federal budget.

(Welch) "We could easily get there, but it does require that you put everything on the table. You know, we've got over \$4 trillion in the federal budget. So trying to hit that target number is something we can do. But if what you want to do is take all out of student assistance, and Pell scholarships, Stafford scholarships, low-income heating assistance, FAA flight safety, you're really going to cut so much out of those programs that you're going to destroy them."

(Kinzel) Some conservative members of the Republican caucus also want to include amendments to the deal that would eliminate funding for a number of specific programs, including the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Welch the adoption of any of these amendments is a deal breaker for him and many members of the Democratic caucus.

(Welch) "But if what you want to impose in it is closing down, for instance, public radio and Planned Parenthood, you want to shut down Obama Care, you want to deny in law the existence of global warming. Those are ideological battles that are just dead ends. They're hand grenades attached to this negotiation."

(Kinzel) Both the House and the Senate need to pass a budget bill this week to avoid a government shutdown.

For VPR News, I'm Bob Kinzel in Montpelier