

## [Herald of Randolph](#)

When U. S. Rep. Peter Welch was first elected to Congress in 2006, he was one of very few new Congressmen who had substantial experience in the business of legislating. Many of his peers were former governors, and a number of them had been successful in business or other pursuits, but that history did not necessarily leave them with the skills of negotiation that Welch developed during his years in the Vermont legislature, many of them in leadership positions.

Since his election, Welch-watchers have noted that his career in Congress has fared well, with excellent committee appointments and good relationships on both sides of the aisle (a rarity in today's Congress).

All that expertise and all those relationships were on the line this fall after Tropical Storm Irene rained down its horrendous damage on Vermont and other states. Usually, after a disaster, Congress jumps to provide funds to help affected states recover. But these are not normal times. Budget consciousness and downright stinginess have so affected Congress that it was clear that it was going to be a tough job to free up the disaster aid that would normally be expected.

The Senate, with a Democratic majority and a Democratic powerhouse in Sen. Patrick Leahy, was not expected to be a problem, but the U.S. House was another matter. The well-mobilized Republican majority there seemed to be poised to deny or greatly cut disaster aid. And as a representative from Vermont, whose reputation in the House is undoubtedly tarnished by rants of Bill O'Reilly and company, Peter Welch would seem to have been in an unenviable position, as he battled for disaster aid for his liberal little state. And he knew it.

"I thought we were probably going to lose," he admitted to The Herald during his visit to Randolph Tuesday.

So Welch drew on his legislative experience. A lone Democrat in the Republican House wouldn't have much pull, so what was needed was a coalition, he realized. The reach of Irene meant that a lot of states needed help. And those states were represented by Republicans as

well as Democrats.

Pulling together an effective, focused coalition of these states and their representatives was Rep. Welch's signature achievement this fall. He admitted he had to incur the wrath of Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi at one time, but in the end his Hurricane Irene Coalition carried the day and brought disaster relief to the affected states.

Welch's public statement after the passage of the aid bill last Monday reflected his coalition-building role. Among those who earned his thanks were three of the House of Representatives' most stalwart Republicans-Speaker John Boehner, Majority Leader Eric Cantor, and Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy.

They and other House members "are operating in an extraordinarily difficult budget environment," Welch acknowledged. "This (bill) could not have been done without their help."

In this ideologically riven era, it's nice to see a Democrat giving prominent thanks to Republicans. And it's even nicer when they deserve it.