

[By Jenna Pizzi](#)

Rep. Peter Welch announced new legislation Monday that would provide a rebate to homeowners who invest in energy-efficiency projects for their homes.

The Home Owner Managing Energy Savings Act is based on Welch's Home Star Energy Retrofit Act, which passed the House in May 2010 but stalled in the Senate. Welch said he hopes the HOMES Act will provide a bipartisan compromise to the earlier bill, despite the partisanship in both houses of Congress.

"We're in an election year, and many people are being somewhat pessimistic about the prospects of something getting done," said Welch. "We can't use that as an excuse not to make a serious effort."

Welch said he is confident that there will be a Republican to co-sponsor the bill before it is introduced.

"The one area where we have a serious shot at bipartisan support is on energy efficiency," he said. "We don't get into the argument about the source of fuel. We don't get into the argument about climate change. Everybody wants to save money on their fuel bill."

The legislation, he said, would benefit all Americans, no matter whether they are from a Republican or Democratic district, because the price of heating fuel is too high for many to afford.

"This is just a wicked burden," said Welch.

The bill would also provide much-needed employment to construction workers and the

American manufacturing industry, said Welch, adding that 95 percent of the products used in energy-efficiency projects are manufactured in the United States.

"You save money and you put people to work and you reduce global warming," said Welch. "This is a win-win-win."

Scott Gardner, who founded Building Energy in 2007, has seen his Williston-based construction and energy audit business grow thanks to similar rebates through Efficiency Vermont.

"Five years ago I had three people on the energy side," said Gardner, who said that now he has half of his 30 employees working on energy-efficiency projects in homes and businesses around Vermont.

But Gardner said that most people will do the cheap and easy projects, like insulating their floors, but will not take the next step to the more expensive projects because they can't afford it.

"It is fairly expensive to make energy improvements," said Gardner. "But if you increase the incentives more people will participate."

At around the same time Welch made his announcement about the new legislation in South Burlington, President Barack Obama urged Congress to pass the Home Star act.

"The administration continues to call on the Congress to pass the Home Star bill, or other mandatory funding legislation aimed at creating jobs by encouraging Americans to invest in energy-saving home improvements," said Obama in a document outlining his 2013 budget proposal.

Welch's HOMES bill would provide a \$2,000 rebate for homeowners who can demonstrate 20 percent energy savings; for every 5 percent in additional energy savings, homeowners could save an additional \$1,000. Under the act, the total rebate would be limited to \$8,000 per home

or 50 percent of the total project cost. Welch said the act would seek a \$2 billion appropriation to fund the rebates.

The Home Star bill would provide two different rebates. The first would be up-front rebates for specific projects like insulating and air sealing, totaling between \$1,500 and \$3,000 or 50 percent of the project cost. The second would provide a \$3,000 rebate for homeowners who demonstrate a 20 percent energy savings on a comprehensive energy audit. For every 5 percent in additional energy savings, homeowners could save an additional \$1,000. The rebate would be capped at \$8,000 or 50 percent of the total project cost.

While the two bills are similar, Welch said he hopes the reduction in rebates will be enough to pass the newer one.

"The reality of the new Congress is that you have to make some new accommodations," said Welch.