

[By Neal Goswami](#)

Vermont Congressman Peter Welch told local Rotarians Friday that Congress' biggest challenge is finding ways to work on behalf of the American people.

"Biggest challenge"

Despite a mounting debt problem and vehement disagreements between Democrats and Republicans on how to address health care reform, energy policy and other issues, Welch told the Bennington Rotary group that finding a way to compromise in Congress is what is most needed.

"The biggest challenge we face in this country, tough as the energy challenge, tough as the debt, tough as it is to figure out how to address health care, the biggest challenge is really having a political system that's functioning where people put down their spears and they acknowledge that our job is to get something done and it requires that we put some skin in the game – and we take pride in progress not a hollow victory," he said.

Welch told the service-minded group Friday that Congress is unable to make decisions and work together for the country. Instead, each issue is run through ideological funnels. He said members of Congress must face issues as they would at home.

"Congress is approaching America's serious problems as though they are ideological problems, that it's an ideological battle as opposed to practical problems that have to be solved. In life, when you engage in the real world, it's usually about solving some practical problem," he said. "It requires real application and not an ideological answer."

"What I'm seeing in Congress is an unwillingness to look case-specifically and have a discussion. The answers are never easy, whether it's health care or the debt. There's a lot of room for debate and disagreement, but the common commitment should be to approach it, in

my view, the way Vermonters more or less do," Welch added. "You sit down and listen to each other and you spend a lot of time trying to understand the problem. In the course of doing that together day in and day out you start to appreciate that the person you started in disagreement with is motivated by the same goal you have -- they want to make it a stronger state or stronger Bennington."

Welch said the country's problems can be solved if Republicans and Democrats learn to approach problems in a collaborative way, and seek practical rather than ideological solutions.

"We could deal with the debt with a practical approach on it. It would mean that all of us have to acknowledge that everything has to be on the table. It would include revenue. It would include cuts in spending in some areas. It would have to have the Pentagon contribute to debt reduction. It's the only way to get from where we are to where we need to be," he said.

Welch said a bipartisan group of 55 House members were able to come together following Tropical Storm Irene to help secure federal funds for recovery. He credited Republican Rep. Chris Gibson, who represents a district in Washington and Rensselaer counties in New York, with helping to secure funding for Vermont.

"He kept saying nice things about Vermont and our farmers and specific things that we needed," Welch said.

But such cooperation rarely lasts beyond tragedies, according to Welch.

"In politics, what I see, is that the competition that is always part of the campaign continues when you get elected. My view is that, sure, it's rough and tumble during the campaign and the voters decide. But, once you get elected your job is cooperation. It's about finding ways to work together to get something done," he said.