

[By Neal Goswami, Bennington Banner](#)

A leaner form of a home retrofitting program introduced in Congress by Rep. Peter Welch is now a cornerstone of a strategy aimed at putting Americans back to work that was outlined Tuesday by President Barack Obama.

Energy proposal

The president said Tuesday he is seeking a program to provide Americans with rebates for completing home improvement projects that make homes more energy efficient.

Such a program will create jobs while improving the environment, Obama said in an economic speech delivered at the Brookings Institution.

"I'm calling on Congress to consider a new program to provide incentives for consumers who retrofit their homes to become more energy-efficient, which we know creates jobs, saves money for families and reduces the pollution that threatens our environment," Obama said.

The retrofitting plan is one part of a three-pronged approach the president announced to lift the nation out of a prolonged recession and curb monthly job losses that at one point was the "equivalent to the population of the state of Vermont," according to Obama.

A more involved retrofitting plan is already part of a bill approved by the U.S. House this past summer. Welch, D-Vt., introduced the Retrofit for Energy and Environmental Performance (REEP) program in March. It was passed by the House in July as part of the American Clean Energy and Security Act, a sweeping climate change bill that includes a "cap and trade" plan. The

REEP provision was added to a Senate version of the bill, but it has since stalled in the Senate.

Welch's REEP plan, based on an existing program in Vermont, seeks to increase building efficiency by 20 percent nationwide. The program would provide cash incentives to homeowners and businesses to retrofit existing buildings.

"Vermont's played a big role in this because basically I'm just advocating for the efficiency program we've had in place since 2000," Welch said in a telephone interview Tuesday.

He urged implementation of REEP through the fall, penning a memo to the White House in October, and gathering a group of 44 House members who signed onto the idea. In recent months, Welch has been working with White House officials, including Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, to develop a more targeted program based on REEP that will encourage job-growth in the short-term.

"Like the rest of us around here, I knew there was going to be a jobs bill, so I was lobbying for it," Welch said.

Available to homeowners

That plan, which would be available only to homeowners, includes a "prescriptive" segment that would offer a rebate for about 10 common upgrades a homeowner can do to improve efficiency. A second "performance" segment would provide additional rebates based on energy savings benchmarks that are met.

Welch said the idea has a "broad coalition of support" because of its benefits, including boosting local jobs, energy savings for homeowners and reducing the country's carbon footprint.

Details about how Obama would fund such a program were not included in his speech. Senior administration officials said in conference call with reporters Tuesday that some elements of the

job growth plan would likely utilize bank bailout money from the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP, that has been repaid to the Treasury.

The administration officials argued that more money from the TARP program is being returned to the Treasury than previously expected. That money can be used to create jobs and lower the deficit, an important task the president is "very cognizant of," they said.

Welch said the plan he is working on with the White House would create 600,000 to 850,000 jobs and cost \$20 billion over two years. It would help Americans save about \$3.3 billion in energy costs, he said.

However, Welch said he would prefer the plan be funded with money from the already approved stimulus plan.

"My preference is to use unallocated stimulus money. That's my preference, but obviously I'll work with my colleagues and the White house to get something done," he said.

Welch said he will continue to work on crafting language for the retrofit program, along with other members of an environmental caucus in the House. The legislation has "a long way to go," but inclusion in the president's plan is "extremely helpful," he said.

"I don't care whether it's my language or someone else's as long as we get it done," he said.