

[By Stephanie Peters, Rutland Herald](#)

Tax burdens and lending restrictions topped the complaints of local business owners and executives who attended a jobs forum Friday with U.S. Rep. Peter Welch.

For Welch, the meeting at the Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce's North Main Street office was the third of four he'll hold in Vermont as a means to better understand the problems challenging the local economy's recovery and, in particular, job creation, he said.

"My advocacy is to promote the local economy. I believe small businesses are the glue that helps to keep it together," he said. "For me the focus has to be on job creation."

"What you know better than anybody is that unemployment is too high and what has worked to stabilize Wall Street hasn't fixed the problems on Main Street," he said.

Welch said he believes reforming the banking and health care industries, and focusing spending on practical sense initiatives like building and repairing infrastructure or retrofitting homes for energy efficiency are the areas that will help promote job creation.

For the most part, the individuals at the table agreed.

Ray Ault, owner of Ault Commercial Realty, said that in his experiences over the past year, the credit industry was almost largely absent. Business was good, but about 40 percent of it came from the sale of foreclosed properties. None of those sales were bank financed; they were either owner financed or paid for in cash, he said.

His observation sparked a conversation about the availability of credit. Joseph Giancola, developer and owner of the Howe Center, said even he had to jump through hoops recently to

get \$200,000 from a bank to purchase a fleet of vehicles for his car rental business.

"Nobody's talking to the regulators," Giancola said, noting that capital is available, but it's the tightened restrictions placed on it that are complicating the process."

On the issue of taxes, Blair Enman, owner of Enman Engineering, spoke about the "absolutely unbearable" burden he finds himself saddled with, including rising unemployment and worker's compensation insurance costs, at the same time he's seen his gross revenues plummet in the past 18 months.

He questioned what benefit one of President Barack Obama's latest tax incentives – a \$5,000 tax credit for any business that hires a new employee – has for truly small businesses that are not in a position to hire.

"I'm so far from hiring a new employee," he said. "With only four employees I would have to increase my workload by 25 percent ... It does nothing for me."

Welch cited his "Cash for Caulkers" proposal, which would create jobs and give tax incentives for energy efficient improvements, as one of the straightforward, common sense initiatives he said could help spur job growth in the near future. He said the proposal is expected to be added to Obama's forthcoming jobs bill.

Tom Donahue and Jamie Stewart, executive directors of the RRCC and Rutland Economic Development Corporation, respectively, also took the opportunity during the meeting to remind Welch of the infrastructure projects in need of funding they believe to be vital to Rutland. Those priorities include western corridor passenger rail service, a 1,000-foot runway extension at Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport and revitalization of the Route 4 corridor through Center Rutland.

Following the morning meeting, which was co-sponsored by REDC, Welch visited General Electric, where he was shown new robotic technology, energy efficient engines and the company's award-winning leadership development program, according to his spokesperson

Paul Heintz.