

With unrest in the Middle East driving oil prices higher and record high demand for heating assistance, Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) has introduced legislation to increase funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Welch spoke about the bill at a recent Capitol Hill press conference. To see video of his remarks, [CLICK HERE](#) .

The Energy Assistance for American Families Act (H.R. 4026) would increase the authorized funding level for LIHEAP to \$7.6 billion per year for the next four years. LIHEAP was last authorized in 2007 with a yearly funding level of \$5.1 billion. The \$2.5 billion in additional funds will help expand the reach of LIHEAP, which currently serves only 27 percent of those who qualify for assistance.

“This is about priorities,” Welch said. “The top five oil companies – who last year made \$137 billion – receive four billion dollars a year in taxpayer subsidies. At the same time, Vermonters struggling with a tough economy and rising energy prices are being told they should make do with less. It’s past time to get our priorities in order.”

In FY2011, Vermont received \$26 million in LIHEAP funding, benefiting 27,000 Vermonters. For those who qualify for assistance, LIHEAP on average covers 13 percent of home heating oil costs.

Vermont’s share of LIHEAP funding is down this year to \$19.5 million. Welch – along with Sens. Leahy and Sanders – are fighting to boost this year’s funding levels to at least what they were in 2011.

Welch introduced H.R. 4026 with Reps. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), John Larson (D-Conn.), Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) and Jim McGovern (D-Mass.).

## Welch introduces bill to expand nationwide heating assistance program

Thursday, 16 February 2012 10:22

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