

*In bipartisan effort, Congressmen pushing to expand program nationwide*

At the VFW in Rutland today, Reps. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Chris Gibson (R-N.Y.) heard from Vermont service members and their families about the importance of expanding a successful veterans outreach program pioneered by the Vermont National Guard. Later today, the Congressmen will convene a similar roundtable in Saratoga Springs with New York service members.

"The message we heard in Rutland today was clear: Veterans need help making a successful transition to civilian life," Welch said. "The Vermont Guard Outreach program is meeting the needs of returning Guard members and is a good model for the nation. We ought to expand it so that veterans around the country receive similar services."

Welch and Gibson are taking the information gathered in the meetings back to Washington to push for passage of their National Guard Outreach Act (H.R. 2403). The bipartisan legislation would expand nationwide the first-of-its-kind Vermont Guard Outreach Program, which sends outreach specialists door-to-door and provides Guard members and their families access to health care services, marriage and financial counseling, substance abuse treatment and other services that are critically important to service members returning from deployments.

The program has proved successful in Vermont, in large part because the outreach specialists are themselves veterans who can relate to the reintegration process and know well the challenges faced by Guard members and their families.

In April of 2011, Welch testified before the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) about the successes of the Vermont Guard program, suggesting it become a model for the nation as veterans return in large numbers from Iraq and Afghanistan. Gibson – who is a HASC member – approached Welch about working together to do just that. In June they introduced H.R. 2403.

Also participating in today's roundtable in Rutland were representatives from the Vermont National Guard, the Vermont Small Business Development Committee and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

## Welch and Gibson hear from veterans in Rutland about successful outreach program

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