

**Statement of Congressman Peter Welch before the House Budget Committee
Wednesday, March 18, 2009**

Chairman Spratt, Ranking Member Ryan, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to come before you to discuss the federal budget and its impact on the State of Vermont. The federal budget reflects the priorities of our nation and speaks to the needs of individuals all across America, individuals who are struggling to make ends meet. I would like to use this opportunity to highlight the cases of several Vermonters who have contacted me over the last year, Vermonters for whom the decisions we make in this budget will make a real difference in their lives.

Last fall, I met Joseph Provost, a Vermont National Guardsman and veteran of the war in Iraq, at the VFW Post in Newport, Vermont, near Lake Memphramagog. At this gathering of veterans and their families, Mr. Provost and his wife spoke about their struggles since Mr. Provost returned from serving in Iraq. He was injured during his service, and came home from Iraq a different man. Mr. Provost applied for disability compensation from the VA in January, 2008, and was still waiting for a decision about his benefits when I met with him last fall. Finally, after nearly ten months of waiting and intervention from my office, Mr. Provost was awarded his due compensation from the VA. I wish that Mr. Provost's case was an isolated incident, but based on my conversations with veterans, he is not alone. Far too many veterans are waiting far too long for a final determination on their VA claim.

Hearing stories like this helps to inform my support for the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget. The Obama administration has proposed a 16 percent increase to the VA budget, or nearly \$113 billion, with a portion of these funds going to modernize the Department of Veterans Affairs disability claims process. The current process is antiquated and badly needs an overhaul. The funding included in this budget means that General Shinsecki and the VA will have the resources to address the problem head-on so that veterans like Mr. Provost do not have to keep waiting for the benefits they have earned and deserve.

The rising cost of health care is also a concern that is squeezing the budget of many Vermonters, like Dan and Cynthia Hampton, who live in my hometown of Hartland, Vermont. They have one son serving in the United States Air Force who is serving in Afghanistan and another who is in the eighth grade. I would like to read an excerpt from a letter that Dan and Lori wrote to me:

I've worked for Imperial Company Inc. of West Lebanon, NH for twenty-seven years. My wife is self-employed. My wife and I have reached a breaking point in terms of affordable health insurance for our family. I learned earlier this week that our health care insurance, which we get through my employer, will increase to \$242.25 per week. This increase combined with the fact that I've gone almost three years without a pay increase and even had my pay cut 10% for over a year and a half has us reeling! We are at a loss as to what our options are.

The Hamptons are among thousands of Vermonters and millions of Americans who are desperately searching for any alternative so that they can afford their health insurance. Even more troubling, there are millions of Americans who lack even the most basic coverage of any kind – Americans for whom one health care emergency could mean bankruptcy or losing their home. This is simply unacceptable.

With this budget, President Obama has shown that he is going to address the challenge of health care reform head-on. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act made significant investments to modernize our system of tracking and sharing medical records. It also provided a substantial subsidy for many of those who have lost their jobs and are utilizing COBRA to continue their coverage. The Administrations FY10 budget continues this trend by making a \$634 billion down payment on health care reform in order to make high quality, affordable health care available for all.

The last story I will share with you today is that of Lucinda Flint from Brandon, Vermont, who contacted me about weatherizing her home. Like many seniors, Ms. Flint lives on a small income and can't afford to pay for the expensive changes to weatherize her home. She heats her home with wood and can't use parts of her house in the winter because they are too cold. As a result, she tells me, she is sick all winter long because she can't properly heat her old home. Her family is ready to help her with the installation; all she needs is some capital to buy some insulation.

The Fiscal Year 2010 budget supports weatherization programs that would help Ms. Flint, building on the Recovery Act that Congress recently passed. It is estimated that savings from weatherization could add up to \$350 per household. Weatherization and other efficiency funding will not only help keep Vermonters warm in the winter, they will help reduce electricity consumption, create jobs, and cut down on greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming. There are thousands of Vermonters like Ms. Flint, who want to save energy, help protect the environment, and improve their own financial situation at the same time – this budget sets us on a path to help them do that.

I am pleased that the Obama budget takes bold, new steps on health care and energy priorities while renewing the promise to our veterans. I strongly support these steps, as they will help individuals and families and strengthen our nation for years to come. I respectfully request that the following e-mails from Daniel Hampton and Lucinda Flint be submitted to the Committee record, and I thank you, again, for the opportunity to speak here today.

E-mail from Mr. Dan Hampton:

Dear Congressman Welch,

My name is Dan Hampton of Hartland Vermont. I am the son of Dan and Lori Hampton, also of Hartland, and a long time resident of Hartland. Together with my wife Cindy I write you out of desperation. We are a hard working couple who have attempted to do

everything right. We have two sons, one of which is serving his country as a member of the USAF and is currently in Afghanistan. Our other son is in the eighth grade. I've worked for Imperial Company Inc. of West Lebanon, NH for twenty-seven years. My wife is self-employed. My wife and I have reached a breaking point in terms of affordable health insurance for our family. I learned earlier this week that our health care insurance, which we get through my employer, will increase to \$242.25 per week. This increase combined with the fact that I've gone almost three years without a pay increase and even had my pay cut 10% for over a year and a half has us reeling! We are at a loss as to what our options are. We would greatly appreciate any information you could provide us with alternative health care coverage. Anything that we're aware of has one or both of us going without insurance for a one year period before anything is available through the state of Vermont. In addition, what if anything is available for our son, as we will not consider having him without insurance.

Thank you in advance for your help regarding this issue.

Respectfully,
Daniel & Cynthia Hampton

E-mail from Ms. Lucinda Flint:

Dear Mr. Welch

I voted for you, as I felt that you really concerned with the senior of this state. Well, I am a senior,(65)and I need help. I need help to insulate my home. I live on a very small income, and I am not well. What I need is to be able to get insulation to put on the outside of my home. My family will help me with putting it up. But I just have enough money at the end of the month, to the pay the basic bills. Is there some kind of grant that would help me with this. I only heat my home with wood. But I cannot use any of the back of my home, as it is so cold. The only rooms that I can use are kitchen, livingroom, and upstairs bedroom. If there is anyway that you can tell me what I can do about this, I would appreciate any help at all. I have been sick all winter long because of being cold. Thank you