

The U.S. House on Tuesday passed legislation written by Rep. Peter Welch to establish a new job training program for veterans.

Welch outlined his Military Transition Program (MTP) Act earlier Tuesday alongside veterans advocates and employers at a press conference at Burlington International Airport. The bill, which was incorporated into H.R. 6132, was passed by voice vote Tuesday afternoon.

"Today we took an important step toward ensuring that Vermonters fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan have the support and training opportunities they will need when they come home to Vermont," Welch said. "As I heard from Vermont Guard members when I visited Afghanistan this month, our soldiers are concerned about finding employment when they return. We must do all we can to help them."

Welch's legislation creates a pilot program that for five years provides financial support to businesses to train and hire up to 500 unemployed or underemployed veterans a year who do not otherwise qualify for training programs. Administered by the Department of Labor in coordination with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, MTP would defray the costs of employment by providing up to 50 percent of a veteran's wages during training.

To qualify for the program, a veteran must be separated from the military and unemployed or paid less than 150 percent of the federal minimum wage.

The legislation, first introduced in 2008 with Rep. John Boozman (R-Ark), would reestablish a successful program implemented in the 1990s to cope with force reductions. This year it was incorporated into a broader veterans bill (H.R. 6132) and, earlier this month, was passed by the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Joining Welch for the event were representatives from businesses and organizations that employ veterans through the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program, including Champlain College Director of Workforce Training Melissa Hersh and People's United Bank Human Resources Manager Sarah Jones. Ed Laviletta, National Legislative Officer of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Vermont, also took part.

House passes Welch veterans employment bill

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