

[Neil P. Goswami, Bennington Banner](#)

Vermont Congressman Peter Welch joined three freshmen Democrats Tuesday in outlining legislation to trim more than \$70 billion from the nation's deficit, a move they hope will garner enough support in the House to force action by congressional leaders.

Welch, a second-term House member, launched the Spending Cuts and Deficits Reduction Working Group Tuesday along with Reps. Gary Peters, D-Mich., John Adler, D-N.J., and Jim Himes, D-Conn. The foursome outlined legislation -- the REDUCE Acts of 2010 -- that will slash \$72 billion from the federal budget by eliminating subsidies, closing loopholes and cutting unnecessary programs, Welch said.

"I'm just doing something I think makes sense to do," Welch said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "Our group was four junior members ... who wanted to focus on constructive steps we could begin taking to address this unsustainable deficit."

The plan comes as the 2010 midterm elections near and voter discord with the fast-growing spending in Washington rises. Peters, Adler and Himes come from either Republican-leaning or swing districts. Welch, however, Vermont's lone congressman, enjoys widespread Democratic and independent support in Vermont. Despite occupying different spots on the political spectrum, Welch said the four working group members are "united over concern of the impact of the debt."

The country is currently facing two main problems -- creating jobs and reducing unemployment and a "structural deficit that has grown too large and unsustainable," according to Welch. Deficit spending is preventing targeted investments in broadband expansion, high-speed rail and repairing bridges and roads, he said.

"We have to have money available to do that, and all that is drained away if we're spending more and more on the deficit," he said.

The four pieces of legislation outlined Tuesday as part of the REDUCE plan target several spending areas, including defense, the component sponsored by Welch. His legislation would terminate three weapons systems -- the C-17 aircraft, the EP-X aircraft and the CG(X) vessel -- and consolidate the armed forces' three military exchanges. Those changes alone would save about \$2.6 billion in 2011 and \$4.1 billion over the next 10 years, according to Welch.

"If Congress is building things that our Secretary of Defense and our military don't want and isn't needed for our security, where will it end?" he said.

Other parts of the REDUCE acts would:

- Eliminate tax loopholes for oil companies and duplicative and unnecessary federal research and development dollars.
  
- Halt unnecessary expansion of the strategic petroleum reserve.
  
- Implement electronic pay stubs for Treasury employees.
  
- Cut millions in funding for the Bureau of Public Debt and the Financial Management Service.
  
- Change the value of certain federal housing subsidies and eliminate the Overseas Private Investment Corp., which subsidizes companies that invest abroad.
  
- Eliminate duplicative and unnecessary programs, such as health care grants administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and subsidies for profitable private logging companies.

Democratic leaders in Congress have not yet signaled any support for the budget-cutting measure. Members can force their hand, though, Welch said, if there is widespread support within the House for enacting spending cuts.

"Our argument to our leadership and membership is let's stop talking and let's start doing," he said. "I think leadership will pay attention if the membership will demonstrate that this is what they want to do. ... I think the members have to start stepping up."

Welch said the four members of the working group are seeking support from other House members. They plan to continue drafting legislation addressing other parts of the federal budget, he said.