

[By Peter Hirschfeld, Rutland Herald](#)

Though it lacks the public option and other key provisions he championed, Rep. Peter Welch said Sunday that the health-care bill expected to pass the U.S. House of Representatives will benefit his constituents here.

The legislation, Welch said, will have immediate impacts for thousands of Vermont families. A provision that allows young adults up to age 26 to stay on their parent's health plans, he said, is particularly important.

"That's incredible peace of mind for parents and those kids who are just getting started in life," Welch said hours before a floor vote in Washington, D.C.

New regulations preventing insurance companies from rejecting prospective clients based on preexisting conditions, he said, will also empower Vermont consumers.

"If you get sick, insurance companies can't take your policy away," he said.

Longer-term, according to Welch, the legislation will tamp down on the rising cost of health-insurance premiums by lowering the number of uninsured Americans. Currently, he said, insured Vermonters pay higher premiums in part to subsidize people without coverage.

"The cost-shift premium that folks with insurance are paying will be diminished," Welch said.

And a new framework for health-care reimbursements, he said, will drive down costs by eliminating a fee-for-service system that provides financial incentives for unnecessary medical procedures.

The shift from that "volume-based" model to the "value-based" model, Welch said, was based largely on the Blueprint for Health program started in Vermont.

"I think it positions Vermont to continue to provide leadership in that essential reform of how we deliver care," he said.

Welch said he's disappointed the bill did not include a public option, a provision he said would have increased competition among health insurance companies and offered consumers a lower-cost alternative to private insurance.

The legislation also lacks new requirements for prescription-drug price negotiations, a measure that Welch said would have saved the country \$156 billion in prescription drug costs over the next decade. The final bill also lacks an antitrust provision that proponents say would have ended alleged collusion among private insurance companies.

"These are concrete issues that would have benefited us immensely and we were unsuccessful in getting them," Welch said. "But many of us are committed to pursuing them."

Welch said the days leading up to the vote have been "tortuous" and "tense." He said he did his best to convince reluctant House colleagues to support the bill.

"When you're up close here it's actually quite tense and quite contentious because every step of the way has been a hand-to-hand-combat style battle," he said.

Welch said the national focus on the legislative process has made the substance of the legislation almost secondary.

"This has been a very tortuous process," he said. "Now I think mercifully we can turn toward the

substance of this. There's no major change that you can achieve without real conflict and debate, and we certainly had our share in this bill."

Welch said the bill's passage marks the beginning of health-care reform, not the end, and that he and the rest of the Vermont delegation will continue to lobby for items not included in the legislation.

"Those of us who support this," he said, "should be modest in recognizing that it's just a first step."