

[Rutland Herald editorial](#)

Some ideas seem too good to pass up: Free cone day at Ben & Jerry's, hitting the snooze button at least once before you fire up the snow blower and paying less to heat your home spring to mind.

Congress can't help with the first two, but Rep. Peter Welch is part of a group trying to make the third a reality.

Welch is one of 45 co-signers of a letter to President Obama urging passage of a program to help retrofit some 5 million homes and/or small businesses nationwide. The House passed the Waxman-Markey energy bill, which includes a long-term outlook on efficiency, earlier this year, and companion legislation is worming its way through the Senate.

The letter urges the president to fast-track a retrofit program that would make available stimulus money for energy efficiency work. The target is "to make five million homes more energy efficient – creating more than 600,000 jobs and saving homeowners \$3 billion a year in energy bills."

While Efficiency Vermont has long been a leader in the field, much of the funding available is income-restricted. The stimulus money would be paid out for measurable improvements in energy efficiency instead.

So it would accomplish several things:

Provide work to domestic contractors and businesses. Retrofitting a house can't be subcontracted overseas.

Reduce demand and so dependence on foreign oil. It's a maxim of the industry that the cheapest kilowatt is the one you don't have to build.

Let the middle class and small business take advantage of government aid to improve their own buildings. This isn't the AIG bailout; this is providing money for individuals. With the slump in real estate values, the equity individuals can borrow against to improve their homes has been severely curtailed, over and above the seizing up of the credit markets we endured over the last year or so.

It's immediate. As a visit to the local hardware store confirms, with winter around the corner, homeowners are busy doing weatherization now. Homeowners could be expected to tap into the funds as soon as they became available, bypassing the bureaucratic process that has slowed stimulus spending and blunted its effectiveness.

Support for any single project maxes out at \$3,000 and is capped at 50 percent of the total cost, so the individual has to invest their own money as well. In general, stimulus projects that have worked have included local matches of some kind, as a check against frivolous projects simply designed to pick the government project.

According to Welch's office, every dollar invested in efficiency returns \$4 in savings. This program makes real money available, invested at a time when people and the economy need it, providing enduring benefits.

Energy efficiency represents the kind of commonsense thinking that Vermonters across the spectrum applaud. The White House ought to approve the measure so homeowners can put the money to good use sooner, rather than later.