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Green acres

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PUTNEY -- U.S. Rep. Peter Welch toured The Putney School's newest field house during a visit to the campus Saturday morning to see the largest **net-zero** energy secondary building in the country. He also took advantage of the new basketball court to play a little 2-on-2 with some of the students as part of his visit.

Welch, D-Vt., walked through the state-of-the-art building while meeting with students and faculty during a trip around Windham County. The Congressman also stopped in Bellows Falls during his weekend visit.

The school's Business Manager Randy Smith showed Welch the computer monitoring system showing how much energy the photovoltaic cells are currently using. He also showed Welch the 16 sun-tracking photovoltaic arrays right outside the field house, with 50 percent of the panels covered through a grant.

Completed in October, the field house produces as much energy as it uses throughout the course of a year. The structure is also on track to become one of the first platinum LEED-certified school buildings in the country.

Smith said the school used labor from the region, as well as local, sustainable products to construct the building, equating to a **net-zero** carbon footprint for the entire field house. "This is a building that anyone can build."

In addition, faculty members said the students assisted in the design of the interior of the building.

"The students had a lot of input into how the building was designed," said School Director Emily Jones.

One of those students, 17-year-old senior Jay Silbaugh, said the field house serves both as a great spot for athletics and other activities, and as a training faculty to teach younger children how to be "stewards of the environment."

Using this field house will help The Putney School staff and students teach others within the community ways to preserve our natural resources, he said. "To make this something for the community at-large," he added.

Welch praised the students for their involvement with the green building, saying the environmental leadership is coming from the younger generation.

"You are the future," he said. The continued success of renewable energy and other eco-friendly living is going to depend on the commitment of today's students, "and that's a wonderful motivation," he added.

Following a quick 2-on-2 pick-up basketball game with three of The Putney School's students, Welch spoke briefly about another energy source in the Green Mountain State -- the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant in Vernon.

While speaking to the press, Welch said Vermont's delegation to Washington has called for increased pressure on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to thoroughly investigate the recent tritium leaks at the reactor, and the statements to the Legislature and state regulators from Entergy -- the owner and operator of the plant -- that conflict with the recent findings.

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Photo:
Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., takes the ball to the hoop in a game with Innocent Obi, 14, and Qianlei Wang, 16, at the all green court, Saturday, at The Putney School. (Miranda Parro/ Reformer)

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