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County gets federal energy block grants

By [HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN](#)

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PUTNEY -- Windham County schools and municipalities have been awarded more than \$378,000 in efficiency and conservation block grants through a provision in the 2007 energy bill that was co-sponsored by Sen. Bernard Sanders.

Sanders, and Gov. James Douglas, will make the announcement about the grants this afternoon in South Burlington. They are part of the \$5.8 million that will go toward 147 different projects around the state.

"This funding will support local efforts to tackle our serious energy challenges. It provides federal recognition of grassroots efforts to cut fossil fuel emissions, improve energy efficiency, and move us toward such sustainable energies as wind, solar, geothermal and biomass," Sanders said on Friday. "I truly believe that there is infinite potential in this program."

Sanders, a member of both the Senate energy and environmental committees, created the Efficiency and Conservation Block grants program in the U.S. Department of Energy.

The money, which was included in the federal stimulus package, is awarded to the state and the applications are considered by the Vermont Department of Public Service and the Clean Energy Development Fund.

Nationally, about \$3.2 billion was included in the program.

The town of Putney won the largest grant in the state in the latest round of funding, and will get \$72,000 to help establish its Property Assessed Clean Energy, or PACE, program which was voters approved at town meeting this year.

Towns that take part in the PACE program can apply for funding which goes to homeowners and business owners who want to invest in energy saving projects for their properties.

PACE is a voluntary program that does not use any taxpayer money. Property owners pay back the loan over a period of up to 20 years through a special assessment on their property tax bill.

Putney's Energy Coordinator, Daniel Hoviss, said the fund will allow property owners to make the investments that will lower heating costs, cut down on carbon dioxide emissions and put the saved investments into the local economy.

"This is a good program for towns in New England where the heating costs are high and the housing stock is old," Hoviss said. "We applied for this money to jumpstart the process."

The grants will go toward incentive programs like the one in Putney, as well as toward improved lighting, renewable energy technology and efficiency retrofits.

The Marlboro Elementary School was awarded \$45,000 to replace part of the outdated heating system in the school that administrative assistant Gail Chaine said wastes money and does not work well.

Chaine said the grant will pay for heaters in five classrooms. "The rooms will definitely be more comfortable and we also expect to save money," she said.

And Newfane Elementary School applied for their grant to help pay for a renovation project to upgrade the insulation in the roof.

Newfane Elementary will receive \$50,000.

An addition was put on the building 16 years ago and Principal Bruce Garrow said the school expects to save about \$8,000 a year with the improvement.

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