

Green for green: Connecticut schools could get funding for energy-efficient upgrades

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Federal legislation, co-sponsored by Connecticut's second district congressman, could authorize \$10 million in Department of Energy funds for energy-efficient construction and upgrades in schools.

The School Building Enhancement Act was created in response to studies that highlighted the energy inefficiency of schools, many of which are decades old, said U.S. Rep. Joseph Courtney, D-2nd District, who announced his support of the bill Thursday. Courtney cited a study done by the Institute for Sustainable Energy several years ago that showed Connecticut schools waste more energy than almost any other kind of building.

Schools in Connecticut could save \$34 million in energy costs if they upgraded their buildings to include more energy-efficient technology, Courtney said, noting the study was done when oil only cost \$60 a barrel. Today it is close to \$100 a barrel.

"If anything, (now) there's an even bigger opportunity for cost savings, and frankly, a greater need with the skyrocketing increases in oil," said Courtney, who is a member of the House Green School Caucus.

U.S. Rep. Rush Holt, D-N.J., who introduced the bill, said about a third of the energy used by schools could be saved by upgrading the energy efficiency of buildings, which would benefit the environment and taxpayers.

"That's money available for teachers or materials," Holt said. "We think this is good education policy, as well as good energy policy."

A bill of the same name was introduced in November 2005, but failed to leave the House education committee. Holt said the bill did not pass because of the unwillingness of committee leadership to move it forward.

"In Washington, energy, environment and climate change are coming of age," Holt said. "These were subjects that only some committed members of Congress talked about. Now everybody's talking about it."

Montville Assistant School Superintendent William Hull said his district would "absolutely" be interested in any grants available for energy-efficiency upgrades.

In Montville's proposed \$36.9 million school budget for 2008-09, electricity costs are 68 percent higher than this year's budget. Hull said soaring costs for electricity and heating oil make up the bulk of the \$2.4 million budget increase.

Hull said administrators are considering installing solar panels in some buildings and only buying equipment that have received the federal Energy Star certification for energy efficiency.

"It may be a tad more expensive, but compared to the recurring cost of electricity over time, you get your money back far quicker," Hull said.

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