



NLIEC NEWS, October 31, 2008

Within the Energy Assistance Community ...

· **Thousands Show up for Annual Utility Discount Day Held by PEPCO and Other Utilities in District of Columbia**

Employees of Pepco Holdings Inc., a member of the NLIEC Board of Directors, turned out in force on September 30 to help the District of Columbia's low-income residents sign up for assistance in paying their utility bills. It's good that they did, because their help was needed —

and appreciated. The event was the Joint Utility Discount Day, an annual event sponsored by the District's Department of the Environment, through its Energy Office. Pepco and other local utilities provided employee volunteers to help applicants sign up to receive assistance. While the final numbers are not in yet, it is believed that nearly 7,000 people signed up for that assistance. The event, held at the Washington Convention Center, was scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. and conclude at 7 p.m., but people were lined up well before then, and the last applicants were not processed until shortly before 9 p.m.

· **Nebraska Energy Assistance Network Partners with Nebraska Head Start to Help Households "Get a Head Start on Energy"**

The Nebraska Energy Assistance Network (NEAN) and Nebraska Head Start agencies are partnering to provide education and materials to Head Start clients on ways to use energy efficiently. The program, dubbed "Get a Head Start on Energy," will run through May 2009 and is aimed at helping 1,000 Nebraska households. "As the cost of living continues to increase, the need for energy assistance is expected to rise," said Judi Martin, Coordinator Community Support /Consumer Relations for the Omaha Public Power District and NEAN chair. "Get a Head Start on Energy' provides information about resources to help families experiencing financial difficulties manage their energy needs and costs." NEAN is a statewide coalition of utilities, human service and governmental agencies and community leaders. It created and funded the "Get a Head Start on Energy" program Head Start professionals use for in-home, hands-on instruction with their clients. — *News release, September 26, 2008*

Read more at:

<http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/newsroom/newsreleases/2008/Sep/nean.htm> <<http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/newsroom/newsreleases/2008/Sep/nean.htm>>

- **Operation: New View CAA Weatherizes More than 100 Eastern Iowa Homes**

More than 350 volunteers joined forces in Dubuque, Iowa, on a Saturday in October for the largest weatherization program in the state. The 55 teams coordinated by the Operation: New View Community Action Agency was targeted at the elderly, disabled or people with heating assistance who just needed a helping hand. Operation: New View executive director Tom Stovall said that, by the end of the day, 107 homes had been weatherized. — *Dubuque (IA) Telegraph Herald*, October 26, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.thonline.com/article.cfm?id=220583> <<http://www.thonline.com/article.cfm?id=220583>>

- **DTE, THAW Adopt New Assistance Program**

DTE Energy and the Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW), a nonprofit energy assistance program, have announced a new way for DTE customers to help their neighbors in need. Called “Cents for Energy” and created by DTE, the program will allow the Detroit-based utility’s electric and gas customers to voluntarily round up payment on their utility bills. The additional money or difference would be given to THAW, which has provided emergency energy assistance to those in need since 1986. — *Detroit Free Press*, October 8, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.freep.com/article/20081008/NEWS05/81008057/1007/NEWS05> <<http://www.freep.com/article/20081008/NEWS05/81008057/1007/NEWS05>>

In Washington ...

- **President Signs Appropriations Bill Providing Full Funding for LIHEAP**

As expected, President Bush signed a continuing resolution that funds most government programs through March 6, 2009, and provides \$5.1 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program in Fiscal Year 2009. The \$5.1 billion is double the FY 2008 level and would fund the program at its fully authorized level. According to the House Appropriations Committee, the increased funding will allow LIHEAP to serve an additional 2 million households and raise the average grant from \$355 to \$550. From the overall appropriation for LIHEAP, \$4.5 billion will be spent on the basic grant program and \$590.3 million will be provided as emergency contingency funds, the same level as provided in FY 08. The president signed the measure September 30.

- **Energy Department Warns of Higher Heating Costs**

Heating U.S. homes with oil this winter will cost a painful \$450 more than a year ago, another slap to families already reeling from high gasoline and food costs and fearful of losing their heat because of unpaid bills. Gas, propane and electricity for home heating will go up as well, but not as much, the government says. Even as oil prices are plummeting and plenty of

natural gas is going into storage, people should brace for higher heating bills "across the board" no matter what fuel is used or region of the country, said Howard Gruenspecht, acting chief of the federal Energy Information Administration. But fuel oil users — about a third of households in the Northeast — will experience the biggest hit with an expected heating bill of \$2,388 on average for the October-March heating season, or 23 percent higher than what it cost last winter. — *Associated Press*, October 7, 2008

Read more at:

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5ihIrlP-heyrhVilzVKCBIXQgFVvgD93LSBVG3> <<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5ihIrlP-heyrhVilzVKCBIXQgFVvgD93LSBVG3>>

In the States ...

- **New Hampshire Expands Low-Income Electric Discount**

In response to increasing energy costs, the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission has expanded the state's Electric Assistance Program (EAP), which provides electric bill assistance to the low income. The EAP's average yearly benefit of \$430 will be offered to 34,000 people this winter, 6,000 more than last year; the program budget will increase by about \$3.3 million to around \$15 million. In existence since 2002, the EAP is funded by a system benefits charge paid by electric customers throughout New Hampshire. — *LIHEAP Clearinghouse*, October 7, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/Oct08/NHEAP.htm> <<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/Oct08/NHEAP.htm>>

- **Governor Proposes New Jersey Stimulus Package**

New Jersey Gov. John Corzine has unveiled an economic stimulus plan intended to immediately assist New Jersey's neediest households, spur short-term employment, support long-term economic development and hold state spending in check. The state will spend an estimated \$150 million of its own money on the plan and also tap into about \$112 million in added federal funding it's receiving to help people pay their energy bills and stabilize neighborhoods hit hard by the foreclosure crisis. "Too many of our neighbors and friends are living with a layoff, lost health care coverage, a mortgage larger than the value of their home or a late notice on a credit-card bill," Corzine said. "I say we cannot stand idly by." — *Parsippany (NJ) Daily Record*, October 17, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.dailyrecord.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/B3/20081017/NEWS0301/810170403/1123/NEWS02> <<http://www.dailyrecord.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/B3/20081017/NEWS0301/810170403/1123/NEWS02>>

- **Massachusetts Low-Income Utility Discounts to Escalate**

Low-income gas and electric utility bill discounts in Massachusetts will increase effective

November 1. This is a result of an order released September 15 by the state's Department of Public Utilities requiring utilities to file new low-income discount rates that restore the percentage value of those discounts to their level as of 1998. During 2007, the value of the discounts was over \$58 million, according to the state's LIHEAP leveraging report, and over 268,000 households received them. However, since 1998, their actual value has eroded considerably due to higher commodity prices. Escalating prices prompted the DPU in February 2008 to open an investigation into expanding low-income consumer protections and assistance, including standards for arrearage management programs, the discount rates, service termination, and energy efficiency programs. Comments filed by the utilities, the Massachusetts Energy Directors Association, the Low-Income Weatherization and Fuel Assistance Network, and others almost unanimously supported the need to expand the discounts. — *LIHEAP Clearinghouse*, October 23, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/Oct08/MA.htm> <<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/Oct08/MA.htm>>

· **Missouri Governor to Talk With Leadership About Special Session**

Momentum appeared to build Wednesday for a special session that would allow lawmakers to act early on a program that offers state assistance for those struggling with utility bills. Gov. Matt Blunt said he would meet with House and Senate leadership after next week's election to discuss Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder's request for a special session. Locally, one relief organization said it supported the move and a pair of lawmakers said they were open to the idea. Kinder called for a special session two weeks ago so that the state could provide \$103 million in supplemental funds for its Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP) before the winter months hit. — *Joplin (MO) Globe*, October 29, 2008

Read more at:

http://www.joplinglobe.com/local/local_story_303222336.html <http://www.joplinglobe.com/local/local_story_303222336.html>

In the News ...

· **Heating Bills Up, But Not as Bad as Feared**

There was rare good news on the energy front Thursday as major utilities indicated increases on winter heating bills will be less dramatic than they had predicted months ago. Meanwhile, Minnesota will receive nearly twice as much federal money to help low-income residents pay their heating bills through the coming winter. State officials announced a \$144.5 million grant, its share of the \$5 billion in a nationwide Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) approved by Congress and signed by the president this week. That's almost double last winter's \$78 million grant. Signals from natural gas markets and at least one of the state's major utilities indicate winter's heating bills are likely to go up about 10 to 15 percent, considerably less than the 30 to 45 percent projected earlier this summer. But assistance agencies are warning that much of the new money will go to cover their clients' past-due bills from last year, with little left for this winter's expenses. "The new help is a huge relief," said

Catherine Fair, director of energy assistance at the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties. "But, and I hate to say it, it's still not enough." — *Minneapolis (MN) Star Tribune*, October 2, 2008

Read more at:

http://www.startribune.com/business/30219259.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:_Yyc:aULPQL7PQLanchO7DiUr <http://www.startribune.com/business/30219259.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:_Yyc:aULPQL7PQLanchO7DiUr>

· **Carbon Monoxide Kills Three in Minneapolis**

Two men and a 14-year-old boy died Thursday when they were overcome by carbon monoxide fumes from a gas generator they were using inside a north Minneapolis home, police said. Firefighters responded to the home about 6:30 p.m. Thursday after being called with reports that several people were inside the home unconscious. When they arrived, they found two men and a boy, the son of one of the men, said Minneapolis police spokesman Jesse Garcia. A gas-powered generator was running in the basement of the house, where the electricity and gas had been turned off in the past couple days, Garcia said. — *Minneapolis (MN) Star Tribune*, October 3, 2008

Read more at:

http://www.startribune.com/local/30219539.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:_Yyc:aU7EaDiaMDCiUT <http://www.startribune.com/local/30219539.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:_Yyc:aU7EaDiaMDCiUT>

· **Seniors Most Vulnerable in Tough Economic Times**

In the wake of the energy crisis -- which will likely be exacerbated by fallout from the failing financial markets on Wall Street -- cutting expenses is fast becoming a way of life for just about everyone. But senior citizens are particularly vulnerable, say some area experts. "Seniors are cutting back on their food and medications. And when the heating season comes, the situation is going to get worse. Their health is going to suffer," said Cindy Rieker of Home Instead Senior Care in Saratoga Springs. — *Saratoga Springs (NY) Saratogian*, October 6, 2008

Read more at:

http://www.saratogian.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=20151853&BRD=1169&PAG=461&dept_id=602469&rfi=6 <http://www.saratogian.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=20151853&BRD=1169&PAG=461&dept_id=602469&rfi=6>

· **In Bad Economy, Power Cutoffs Soar**

The number of Americans whose electricity or gas has been shut off for nonpayment of their bills is up sharply in many parts of the country as people struggle to cope with higher prices and a shaky economy. Shut-offs have been running 17 percent higher than last year among

customers of New York state's major utilities, and 22 percent higher in economically hard-hit Michigan. They are up in all or part of dozens of other states, including Pennsylvania, Florida and California, according to an Associated Press check of regulators and energy companies. Despite stepped-up efforts by state and federal governments, utilities and private groups to help people avoid shut-offs this winter, some worry the problem will only get worse in the coming months, particularly with the downturn on Wall Street. — *Associated Press*, October 6, 2008

Read more at:

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5gxa6CESVTg4kMwjUstZFvjd1VKzAD93L5MV00> <<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5gxa6CESVTg4kMwjUstZFvjd1VKzAD93L5MV00>>

Record Numbers Seek Heating Aid

District of Columbia residents are applying for help to pay their utility bills in record numbers, and there may be worse to come: Heating costs are forecast to rise up to 23 percent this winter. D.C. resident Michelle Williams, a single mother of two, said Wednesday that she asked for help when her utility bills — including air conditioning — increased to more than \$200 a month. “They just got higher and higher, and it’s only October so it’s not going to get any better. I just couldn’t afford it,” said Miss Williams, 39, who was standing in line with dozens of other residents at the Frank D. Reeves Municipal Center in Northwest to receive city assistance with her energy bill. — *Washington Times*, October 9, 2008

Read more at:

<http://washingtontimes.com/news/2008/oct/09/record-numbers-seek-heating-aid/> <<http://washingtontimes.com/news/2008/oct/09/record-numbers-seek-heating-aid/>>

Kyl: Arizonans Shortchanged on Utility Bill Help

Arizona is getting three times the amount of federal cash it received last year to help residents with utility bills. But a federal lawmaker believes it should actually get more. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on Thursday awarded Arizona nearly \$31.1 million for the new budget year under the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Last year the state’s share was less than \$10 million. But the figure represents less than 1 percent of the \$5.1 billion being distributed. And many states smaller than Arizona are getting far more. The reason is that Congress refused to listen to pleas by Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., and some others to revamp the formula. — *Mesa (AZ) East Valley Tribune*, October 16, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/128248> <<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/128248>>

Suddenly, Fuel Aid Providers Have Money to Burn

Massachusetts will receive about \$213 million in federal funds for its low-income heating assistance program, a more than \$80 million increase over last year that local advocates say is much needed. “There was so much uncertainty a couple of months ago,” said Phil Hailer, spokesman for the state Department of Housing and Community Development. “It was very

scary indeed, so to have this kind of turnaround in such a short amount of time is certainly good news.” In addition to the funds released this week, the state’s Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP, has \$11.5 million in fuel aid carried over from last year’s federal appropriation and an additional \$10 million in state funds, for a total of about \$235 million, according to Mr. Hailer. — *New Bedford (MA)*, Standard-Times, October 18, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.southcoasttoday.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081018/NEWS/810180335/-1/NEWS10> <<http://www.southcoasttoday.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081018/NEWS/810180335/-1/NEWS10>>

· **More Heating Aid Coming, But Bills Also Climbing**

The good news for poor families who are worried about having enough money to stay warm this winter is that there will be more money to help them out. The bad news is that higher heating costs soon will gobble up that additional aid. Under pressure from advocacy groups and in the face of higher fuel prices, Congress nearly doubled heating-assistance funding for low-income households recently. ... “Looking at the whole picture, this big increase is only going to offset part of a household’s increased energy costs, with double-digit increases in all of the heating options,” said Tom Stovall, director of Operation: New View Community Action Agency, which administers the program in Iowa’s Dubuque, Delaware and Jackson counties. — *Dubuque (IA) Telegraph Herald*, October 20, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.thonline.com/article.cfm?id=219859> <<http://www.thonline.com/article.cfm?id=219859>>

· **Home Heating Aid Up, But Costs Rise Higher**

Funding to help low-income households pay their heating bills has increased by \$21.5 million this year, but a coalition of Massachusetts community groups contend that even with that bump, the aid isn’t keeping pace with fuel costs. Advocates for elderly and low-income residents rallied at the State House last Wednesday morning to urge Gov. Deval Patrick to do more to protect the poor this winter. The rally took place just hours before the governor announced a “fiscal action plan” marked by spending cuts designed to close a state budget gap of more than \$1.4 billion. — *Boston Bay State Banner*, October 22, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.baystatebanner.com/local11-2008-10-23> <<http://www.baystatebanner.com/local11-2008-10-23>>

· **The Heat is On, But Help Falls Short**

Last winter, Stayci Bell paid more than \$200 a month to heat her four-bedroom house in Coon Rapids, MN. All things considered, her full-time job was enough to support her and her six kids at home. This year, though, uncertainty about the economy led her to seek help with her energy bill. “Times are tougher this year,” she said. “I just wanted to have that little help.

Money is hard to stretch, and I didn't want to any threat of having my heat disconnected this winter." The combined impact of volatile natural gas prices, historically high gasoline and grocery prices, and a conspicuously ailing economy has folks fearing the onset of winter, and increasingly seeking help. — *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 22, 2008

Read more at:

http://www.startribune.com/local/north/32664194.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:_Yyc:aU7EaDiaMDCiUZ <http://www.startribune.com/local/north/32664194.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:_Yyc:aU7EaDiaMDCiUZ>

· **BGE Honors Annapolis Man for Energy-Assistance Work**

Because of the pioneering efforts of one Annapolis man almost 30 years ago, many less fortunate families in the area have had warm homes through harsh winters and even harsher economic recessions. In observance of National Energy Assistance Month this month, Baltimore Gas and Electric Co. officials presented their annual Humanitarian Award yesterday to Allen C. Jackson, a local resident who played a major role in establishing the Anne Arundel County Fuel Fund in November 1979. Mr. Jackson also was acknowledged yesterday for creating the Fuel Fund Envelope Campaign in February 1980. — *Annapolis (MD) Capital*, October 23, 2008

Read more at:

http://www.hometownannapolis.com/cgi-bin/read/2008/10_23-43/TOP <http://www.hometownannapolis.com/cgi-bin/read/2008/10_23-43/TOP>

· **Maryland's Fuel Fund Faces Depletion**

The Fuel Fund of Maryland Inc. is running on empty. The nonprofit organization that helps low-income families in central Maryland pay energy bills started its fiscal year in July with \$1 million less than it had the same time last year. And its savings, which topped \$850,000 this time last year, have dwindled to about \$175,000. "We've depleted our war chest," said Mary Ellen Vanni, executive director of the Fuel Fund. Rising energy costs, lower profits for corporate donors and cash-strapped private contributors have crimped the Towson-based Fuel Fund's money supply, leaving it at an all-time low. — *Baltimore Business Journal*, October 24, 2008

Read more at:

<http://baltimore.bizjournals.com/baltimore/stories/2008/10/27/story2.html?b=1225080000%5E1721793> <<http://baltimore.bizjournals.com/baltimore/stories/2008/10/27/story2.html?b=1225080000%5E1721793>>

· **Heating Oil Prices Fall: Time to Lock in Price?**

The weather outside might be frightful this winter, but it looks like the season will be less painful for homeowners who heat with oil than this summer's \$145-plus crude oil prices had suggested. Still, heating oil is about 90 cents a gallon more than it was two years ago — averaging \$3.48 a gallon on Monday on Long Island, according to the New York State Energy

Research and Development Authority. To help keep costs under control — most Long Islanders warm their homes with heating oil — many experts say now might be the time to sign up for a fixed price or a capped price for the winter. As the name indicates, a fixed price is set for the duration of the contract, usually a year. — *Melville (NY) New York Newsday*, October 27, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.newsday.com/business/ny-bzfuel1026,0,2142900.story> <<http://www.newsday.com/business/ny-bzfuel1026,0,2142900.story>>

Editorials ...

• More Help for Staying Warm

With all the financial challenges average citizens are facing in these chaotic times, we can only hope that the unseasonably balmy weather of the last week holds for a while. A cold winter could break the bank for the average family; for a low-income family, it could be devastating. That's why Pennsylvania Gov. Rendell's announcement yesterday that the state will be offering extra heating help was welcome indeed. This year, \$280 million is earmarked -- and we mean that in a good way -- for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. ...Still, the big change that we have advocated has yet to materialize. The LIHEAP money that the governor announced yesterday is all federal money. — *Philadelphia Daily News*, October 15, 2008

Read more at:

http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20081015_More_help_for_staying_warm.html <http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20081015_More_help_for_staying_warm.html>

• Heating Help a Must This Winter

Whoever wins the presidency November 4 should pledge to make home heating assistance a priority when he takes office next January. Last winter millions of Americans struggled to pay the high cost of heating their home. They turned down the thermostat and braced themselves against lower-than-usual indoor temperatures in an attempt to economize. Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program funds, the nation's largest source of home-heating help, didn't go nearly far enough to ensure that poor families and seniors living on a fixed income could stay comfortably warm. That situation is likely to be worse this year. ... Starting November 5, the president-elect will have the bully pulpit, an opportunity to argue long and loud for compassion for the poor and proper funding for one of life's most basic needs, protection from winter's frigid temperatures. The new president should make LIHEAP funding a priority to make sure no American is left out in the cold. — *Stroudsburg (PA) Pocono Record*, October 16, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.poconorecord.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081016/NEWS04/810160306> <<http://www.poconorecord.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081016/NEWS04/810160306>>

• Helping People in Tough Times

With many Pennsylvanians facing the double whammy of higher heating costs and a sluggish economy, we welcome the news that the state will be kicking \$87 million more into its heating assistance program. Compared to other spending areas, this seems like a bargain that will save lives. ... While we push for reining in state spending and reducing the state's ballooning budget, we do applaud making money available for programs to help those in emergency situations. — *Johnstown (PA) Tribune-Democrat*, October 22, 2008

Read more at:

http://www.tribune-democrat.com/editorials/local_story_296112248.html <http://www.tribune-democrat.com/editorials/local_story_296112248.html>

· **Energy Emergency**

Orville Huntington told the Alaska Federation of Natives convention Friday how soaring energy costs don't just strap Alaska villages, they threaten to finish them off. In Huntington's home village of Huslia, a recently hired teacher didn't last long enough to leave no child behind. The teacher checked prices for fuel and food, and took the next plane out. ... There's no single, swift solution. But Alaska has the resources to do better by rural Alaskans. — *Anchorage (AK) Daily News*, October 26, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.adn.com/opinion/view/story/568607.html> <<http://www.adn.com/opinion/view/story/568607.html>>

Commentaries ...

· **People Face Burden and Hard Choices**

Not coincidentally, the day I was asked to write this column, the front page of The New York Times spelled out the grim reality for the nation's low-income and even moderate-income individuals and families. "In Sour Economy, Some Scale Back on Medications," it read. It could just as well have stated, "In Sour Economy, Many Scale Back on the Thermostat." As the weather turns cooler, many of us are already starting to kick up our thermostats. But thousands of our friends and neighbors can't do that because they can't afford to pay their ever-increasing utility bills. — Virginia T. Lodge in *Nashville (TN) The Tennessean*, October 27, 2008

Read more at:

<http://www.tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081027/OPINION01/810270325/1008/opinion01> <<http://www.tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081027/OPINION01/810270325/1008/opinion01>>

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