
NLIEC News

October 30, 2009

In the Energy Assistance Community

Photo Campaign Launched for NFFN's LIHEAP Action Day on February 10, 2010

The National Fuel Funds Network is launching a new campaign to help it make a better case to Congress for more funding for LIHEAP. NFFN is asking its members to send in photographs that illustrate the increased demand for energy assistance. "We are seeking photos of people lined up to apply for energy assistance or photos of crowded waiting rooms that can help us demonstrate just how important energy assistance is to millions of Americans," NFFN Executive Director George Coling said in an e-mail to the Network's members. "I encourage you to use your digital cameras or cell phone cameras to record what's going on in your area and then e-mail the images to <mailto:info@nationalfuelfunds.org>. Please include a date and place with each photo, if possible. Also, please check your local newspaper for photos that you could forward to NFFN." He said the Network will collect the images for use during NFFN's LIHEAP Action Day, on February 10, 2010. Depending on what it receives, NFFN will produce a brochure, collage or other package of images to give members of Congress to illustrate —and put faces on — the demand for assistance.

EDITORIAL COMMENT FROM NEAN: Make sure you secure "photo releases" from individuals before you submit their photos.

Winners Announced in Drive Smarter Challenge Video Contest

The winner of the \$5,000 grand prize in the recent *Drive Smarter Challenge* campaign video contest is David Markus of Beverly Hills, California, creator of "Backseat Smart Driver." His was the entry in which two buddies get fuel-efficiency tips from a savvy "Smart Driver" perched in the back seat. Each of the 65 qualifying entries competed for the cash grand prize from ExxonMobil and three other major prizes: NASCAR and Indy race day outings and a transportation package that includes new Michelin tires. The second, third and fourth place prizes are going to: "Car Pooling" by Alec Wells, who will win a VIP Indy Racing League Package; "Driving Smart: 3 Easy Tips" by Arturo Morales, who will get a VIP NASCAR Race Package; and "A Smarter GPS" by Andy Anderson, who claims the Transportation Efficiency Package. NLIEC is a partner in the *Drive Smarter Challenge* along with two members of its Board of Directors: the **Alliance to Save Energy** and the **National Fuel Funds Network**. NLIEC Executive Director David Fox was one of the judges who narrowed the field of entries to 10 finalists who were voted upon by the general public. The four winning videos can be viewed at <http://drivesmarterchallenge.org/contest>, and the campaign's fuel-efficiency tips and other resources are available on the main *Drive Smarter Challenge* website: <http://drivesmarterchallenge.org>.

- **New Jersey SHARES Received \$265,000 in Additional Utility Contributions**

Since July, four utilities have contributed an additional \$265,000 to New Jersey SHARES over and above the amounts they traditionally contribute to the organization to provide help to households in need. New Jersey SHARES Executive Director Jim Jacob said the grants “will make a true difference for limited income households who are facing difficult choices whether to feed their families or pay their energy bills.” In July, New Jersey Natural Gas contributed an additional \$100,000 beyond the amount they had contributed earlier. South Jersey Gas added \$100,000 to its contribution to New Jersey SHARES in September, and two other utilities – Elizabethtown Gas and Atlantic City Electric – made additional contributions of \$40,000 and \$25,000 respectively in October. “We are grateful ... for their long standing partnership and continued commitment as we address the energy burden facing households in New Jersey,” Jacob said. New Jersey SHARES is a member of the NLIEC Board of Directors.

- **New Jersey SHARES Administering New Jersey American Water's Assistance Programs**

This month, New Jersey SHARES announced that it is now participating in the delivery of bill payment assistance programs to New Jersey American Water customers throughout the state. On October 1, New Jersey SHARES officially took over the administration of two programs: “H2O To Help Others” and the “Low Income Payment Program.” H2O To Help Others, for households 200 percent or below the federal poverty level, is a grant up to \$500 to be applied to qualified clients’ New Jersey American Water bills. For eligible clients 175 percent or below the federal poverty level, the Low Income Payment Program offers a discounted rate that can be applied monthly. New Jersey is currently developing an electronic application for its agency partners; the application process is likely to be similar to that of its energy programs.

In Washington

- **Energy Information Administration Predicts Decline in Winter Heating Costs**

The U.S. Energy Information Administration is predicting that average household expenditures for space-heating fuels will be \$960 for the period from October 1 to March 31, 2010 — a decrease of 8 percent from last winter. In its Short-Term Energy and Winter Fuels Outlook, the EIA said households heating primarily with natural gas can expect to spend an average of 12 percent less this winter than a year ago. Heating oil costs are expected to decline by 2 percent, while propane costs are forecast to decline by 14 percent. It said households heating primarily with electricity can expect to spend an average of 2 percent less than last winter. — **Energy Information Administration**, October 6, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/steo/pub/contents.html>>

- **HHS Releases LIHEAP Funds Under Continuing Resolution Passed by Congress**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has announced the release of \$2.7 billion in first-quarter block grant funds for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program under the Fiscal Year 2010 continuing resolution. “These funds represent states’ first quarter requests of FY 2010 funds, up to 75% of the requests, based on the FY 2009 block grant level of \$4.509 billion,” HHS said. “This means that states requesting 75% or less of their

annual allocations in the first quarter will receive their full request. States requesting over 75% in the first quarter (76% to 100%) will receive 75% under the CR limitation.” — *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*, October 22, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS206774+22-Oct-2009+BW20091022>>

For a state-by-state allocation list, go to: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/press/2009/liheap_2010.html>

- **Senate Panel Holds Hearings on Climate-Change Legislation**

The U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee began three days of hearing on climate change legislation on October 27. In advance of the hearings, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) released the “Chairman’s mark” of the bill, which among other things, provided details as to how the legislation would ease the impact of higher utility costs on low income households. The working draft, like the House-passed climate change bill, employs a “cap and trade” system to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The funds generated through the auctioning of emission allowances would be used to protect low- and moderate-income households against energy costs increases related to the legislation. According to the draft, 15 percent of the distributed allowances will be auctioned annually with the proceeds going to low- and moderate-income households. The legislation does not detail how these funds would be distributed. In order to protect users of home heating oil and propane, the legislation requires that the states receive 1.5 percent of the distributed allowances for programs to benefit those consumers.

Read the text of the chairman’s mark at: <http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=ee5c67bb-a5a7-453d-a4e0-4c8f2908c0cf>

In the States

- **Lame-duck Member of Florida Public Service Commission Quits Post**

Florida Public Service Commissioner Katrina McMurrian has resigned from the embattled state utility regulation board two months before her term expires, after Gov. Charlie Crist failed to reappoint her. In her resignation letter to Crist, McMurrian cited the governor’s request that the PSC postpone decisions on increasing base rates for Florida Power & Light and Progress Energy until his two new commissioners begin their jobs in January. McMurrian refused last month to remove herself from FPL’s \$1.3 billion rate case after a consumer advocate in the case accused her of improperly serving on a panel with one of the company’s top executives and attending a dinner with him. She apologized, saying her actions created a “cloud” over the commission, but insisted she could remain impartial. On October 1, Crist bypassed both McMurrian and Commission Chairman Matthew Carter for reappointment when he named David Klement and Benjamin “Steve” Stevens to the five-member PSC, saying, “it was time to clean house.” — *Miami Herald*, October 5, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.miamiherald.com/1374/story/1267906.html>>

- **Wisconsin Utility Surcharge Could Make Some Ratepayers Hot**

The latest reason that utility bills are going up around the state has nothing to do with keeping the lights on. A new surcharge on utility bills, tacked on as part of the budget that was passed in June, will be used to pay the salaries and benefits of district attorneys in counties across

Wisconsin. The prosecutors are being paid from a fund originally designed to help poor people pay their utility bills and weatherize their homes. The extra fee, which hits We Energies customers in December, is the latest in a series of budget maneuvers that have sent a total of \$166 million from electricity ratepayers to non-energy-related state government purposes since 2002. — *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 16, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/64654067.html>>

- **Texas Public Utility Commission Working on Rules That Target Prepaid Electricity Companies**

Texas Public Utility Commission members have acknowledged that their rules don't account for the way prepaid electricity companies do business and instructed PUC staff to speed up a rulemaking process on the topic. Responding to an article in *The Dallas Morning News* earlier this month that described a type of pay-as-you-go electricity service that targets low-income residents, commissioners called executives with two prepaid companies to the stand at a meeting Thursday. Many prepaid electricity providers, which don't require a deposit but ask customers to pay for power before consuming it, have the worst PUC complaint ratings. Customers of prepaid companies lodge complaints with the PUC at a higher rate than customers with other types of companies. — *Dallas Morning News*, October 26, 2009

Read more at: <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/bus/stories/DN-puc_26bus.ART.State.Edition1.3cf8887.html>

- **Florida to Get \$200 Million for “Smart” Power Grid**

Florida is getting \$200 million in stimulus money to create a “smart grid” for utility customers that should result in lower electric usage, government officials announced Tuesday morning. The money is going to Energy Smart Florida, a program involving Florida Power & Light that plans to install 2.6 million smart meters in homes and advanced monitoring systems in the grid substations, a federal official said. “The impact of this will be felt throughout Florida.” The money is coming from \$3.4 billion that President Barack Obama announced Tuesday as part of a package to bring America's power system into the 21st century. — *Miami Herald*, October 27, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.miamiherald.com/1374/story/1302367.html>>

In the News

- **Stimulus Funds to Help Local Homeless**

Federal stimulus funding will be making its way to a Connecticut agency to help the homeless and many who are on the brink of homelessness due to the economic downturn. New Opportunities, Inc., which operates out of Waterbury but also services Torrington and the entire northwestern region, is set to receive \$1,403,861 to provide assistance in the form of everything from emergency lodging and rent to fuel donations and eviction intervention. The money comes at a crucial time for the agency, said New Opportunities Chief Administrative Officer Toni Hirst, since there are greater numbers of people in need because of the poor economy. “Energy assistance is already overflowing. People aren't working and expenses are going up,” she said. — *Torrington (CT) Register Citizen*, October 3, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.registercitizen.com/articles/2009/10/03/news/doc4ac6c7c7d1487492820650.txt>>

- **Dad, Daughters Link Needy With Those Willing to Help**

How do I begin this? We are and were a normal family that has been turned upside down. I lost my job of 5 years at a Spokane Valley manufacturing facility. This happened 2 months ago and we have been running out of money, patience, food and are about to lose our home. I am simply looking for food for my family. If someone could PLEASE provide possibly 2 weeks worth of food and nothing extravagant. We just need the basics. I have 2 young children (boy and a girl) and really just need a kind heart to help us please. I can tell you more of my situation if you want to hear it. Thank you for listening. Michael. It would take a heart of stone not to be moved by the examples of overwhelming need and selfless acts of kindness found on a Web site called 2Hands.org. The “assistance portal” – something like Craigslist for the poor – has helped as many as 3,000 people nationwide since it was founded in Spokane two years ago. — *Spokane (WA) Spokesman-Review*, October 4, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2009/oct/04/hands-on-kindness/>>

- **Heating House With Oven Leads to Fire**

Gutted and charred, a small house on East 38th Street is a total loss after catching fire early Sunday morning. Two teens were in the home babysitting their two year-old nephew. All three made it out safely. “They were using the oven to heat the house and at one point, the oven caught on fire. They noticed an orange glow flicker coming from the kitchen. They went in to investigate. The oven was on fire so they got out of the house and called 911,” said Indianapolis Fire Department Captain Rita Reith. But the damage was done. It’s unclear if something in the oven like grease caught fire, or if it was something else. Officials say heating should be left to furnaces. — *WTHR-TV*, Indianapolis, Indiana, October 4, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.wthr.com/Global/story.asp?S=11255834>>

- **Heating Aid Could Fall Short of Needs**

Record numbers of low-income people and senior citizens who can’t afford to heat their homes are applying for help, say some local agencies that distribute aid and struggle with the recession’s fallout. “The overwhelming need we have (for heating aid) far surpasses any of our resources,” says Dave Dexheimer of Douglass Community Services in Hannibal, Mo., which is getting 25 percent more calls than a year ago. It has \$60,000 in state heating funds, down from \$100,000 last year. Savings from a drop in some fuel prices “is being canceled out by increasing numbers of families who are losing their jobs,” says Mark Wolfe of the National Energy Assistance Directors’ Association. — *USA Today*, October 5, 2009

Read more at: <http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/energy/2009-10-04-heating-aid_N.htm>

- **Nebraska Homeless Shelters are Growing**

Madison Marsh celebrated her first birthday with a splurge lunch at the Golden Corral — paid for by her mom’s plasma donation — and, afterward, cake in the Council Bluffs shelter her family is calling home. Dad’s concrete-pouring job in North Dakota went bust, and mom’s entry-level wages weren’t worth gas-guzzling commutes in a 19-year-old car they don’t trust. So six weeks ago, the Marshes packed what they could fit in their oil-burning, rusted Chevy Blazer and headed south. They joined a growing number of families in what some local

advocates for the homeless see as a twofold economy-driven trend: a rise in homeless families and an increase in homeless transplants from outside the Omaha metropolitan area. — *Lexington (NE) Clipper-Herald*, October 6, 2009

Read more at: <<http://lexch.com/articles/2009/10/06/news/regional/doc4acb4b5b23031546237461.txt>>

Changes to LIHEAP Program May Hurt Those Who Need Heating Help

When Joan Manno desperately needed help heating her home last winter, she was able to get a \$600 emergency grant through the federally-funded Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. “It’s a really big difference, cash-wise,” the Moscow-area resident said Wednesday during the lunch period at the Dunmore Senior Citizens’ Center. This year, however, the emergency aid may not be readily available when she, or others, need it. Proposed changes to the state’s LIHEAP program could decrease income eligibility limits, reduce aid amounts and delay help for those who need it most. — *Scranton Times Tribune*, October 8, 2009

Read more at: <http://www.thetimes-tribune.com/changes_to_liheap_program_may_hurt_those_who_need_heating_help>

Heating Help in High Demand

Although the weather outside was unseasonably warm in West Virginia on Wednesday afternoon, many used the nice day to seek home heating assistance in anticipation of the next blast of cold weather. The Bluefield Union Mission reported a “record day” with more than 27 families stopping by the mission offices on Bluefield Avenue by Wednesday afternoon to request home heating help. The Tazewell County Department of Social Services also reported Wednesday that more than 1,500 individuals had already applied for heating help through the agency’s fuel assistance program. The Salvation Army in Bluefield also continued Wednesday to receive calls from families in both West Virginia and Virginia in need of home heating assistance. — *Bluefield (WV) Daily Telegraph*, October 21, 2009

Read more at: <http://www.bdtonline.com/cnhi/bdtonline/homepage/local_story_294204746.html?keyword=leadpicturestory>

Constellation Energy Contributes \$1 Million to Establish BGE Heating System Replacement Program

Constellation Energy is donating \$1 million to the Baltimore Community Foundation to establish the *Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BGE) Heating System Fund*, which will provide new, energy efficient furnaces to qualifying limited-income customers in Baltimore in need of a heating system replacement. “Constellation Energy is pleased to expand our partnership with the city of Baltimore and the Baltimore Community Foundation by helping working families in Baltimore make substantial improvements to their home heating systems,” said Mayo A. Shattuck III, chairman, president and chief executive officer of Constellation Energy. “This program is designed to assist limited-income households that do not qualify for existing energy assistance programs but are nonetheless struggling to make ends meet during this severe economic downturn.” The *BGE Heating System Fund*, to be launched in November, will provide furnace replacements to qualified households above income eligibility levels for state utility bill assistance grants. The eligible household income level will be set at

the qualifying amount for the *Maryland Weatherization Assistance Program*. — *Business Wire*, October 22, 2009

Read more at: <http://www.businesswire.com/portal/site/home/permalink/?ndmViewId=news_view&newsId=20091022005776&newsLang=en>

Editorials

· Heating Aid May Need a Winter Boost

Good news and bad news. As the days become colder and snow seems near, people are now concerned about heating their homes for the winter. First the bad news. Low-income people and seniors who can't afford to heat their homes are applying in droves for heating assistance from agencies that distribute the aid, Low-Income Home Energy Assistant Program. They are struggling with the recession and find financial resources for the winter to be bleak. — *Bemidji (MN) Pioneer*, October 7, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.istockanalyst.com/article/viewiStockNews/articleid/3535356>>

Commentaries

· Not Dealing With Global Warming Will Cost Taxpayers Far More Money

You wouldn't know it from the recent actions of the Barack Obama administration or the U.S. Senate, but the single greatest challenge confronting Americans in the 21st century is global warming. Here's why. The vast majority of climate scientists agree that global warming is caused by human actions that are releasing increasing amounts of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, into the atmosphere. We have to go back 2.1 million years to find as much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as we have today. If these trends continue, we face a worldwide catastrophe. — John Paul Rossi in the *Erie (PA) Times-News*, October 3, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.goerie.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091003/OPINION09/310039995/-1/OPINION>>

· Re-examining Public Welfare Spending

Pennsylvania has, as of this writing, gone 90 days without a budget, longer than any other state. The impasse has been driven by Gov. Ed Rendell's demand for higher spending and new taxes. Though Rendell argues that the budget has been "cut to the bone," the work of a leading member of his own party, Auditor General Jack Wagner, proves otherwise. In a series of audits, Wagner found waste and fraud in several state Department of Public Welfare's (DPW) programs. Audits of the state's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) have revealed the same problems repeatedly. LIHEAP provides grants to households with incomes of up to 150 percent of the federal poverty line, meaning a family of four earning up to \$29,025 can receive benefits. Two audits over a three years revealed lax procedures, insufficient supervision, and inadequate oversight. The second audit resulted in the arrest of 18 people for stealing more than \$500,000 of LIHEAP funds and related crimes. — Abhilash Samuel in the *Pottstown (PA) Mercury*, October 7, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.pottsmmerc.com/articles/2009/10/07/opinion/srv0000006568799.txt>>

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