
NLIEC NEWS

February 27, 2009

Within the Energy Assistance Community ...

NFFN's LIHEAP Action Day Continues to Grow

More than 190 members of the **National Fuel Funds Network** and supporters participated in NFFN's LIHEAP Action Day February 11, visiting more than 200 congressional offices to urge their delegations to support federal energy assistance. NFFN members reported they visited the offices of many of the new members of the House and Senate as they used Action Day as a means of educate as well as lobby. Around midday, NFFN Chairperson Sue Montgomery Corey, LIHEAP recipient Victoria Seals of Jackson, Mississippi, and **American Gas Association** Chairman Tom Skains participated in a news conference with lawmakers to stress the need for energy assistance funding. Members of Congress participating in the news conference included Reps. Jim Oberstar (D-MN), Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), Bobby Rush (D-IL), Gene Green (D-TX), Paul Hodes (D-NH), and Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH). The lawmakers all expressed their support for LIHEAP and said they believed there would be other legislative opportunities to increase LIHEAP funding for the current fiscal year. AGA, which once again opened their offices for Action Day participants to use as a base of operations, posted blogs about Action Day on their website. NFFN and AGA are members of the National Low Income Energy Consortium Board of Directors.

View the AGA blog at:

<http://www.truebluenaturalgas.org/liheap-action-day-at-least-51-billion-in-funding-for-2010>

New Jersey SHARES to Handle Calls for the State's Energy Programs

New Jersey SHARES will soon launch a call center to answer inquiries for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and Universal Service Fund program as the result of a grant awarded by the state Department of Community Affairs. The new initiative allows for a comprehensive response to questions on all energy programs available in the state equating to greater energy assistance to our New Jersey neighbors. New Jersey SHARES is a member of the National Low Income Energy Consortium Board of Directors.

Duke Energy Foundation Contributes \$800,000 to Energy Assistance Programs

The Duke Energy Foundation contributed \$400,000 to its Share the Warmth program in North and South Carolina. In addition, the utility announced a \$400,000 contribution to energy assistance programs in its Midwest service area. The foundation said the Helping Hand program in Indiana would receive \$200,000, HeatShare in Ohio would receive \$150,000 and WinterCare in Kentucky would receive \$50,000.

The programs provide energy assistance grants to low-income and elderly customers. The foundation's parent, Duke Energy, is an associate member of the National Low Income Energy Consortium.

- **Energy Programs Consortium Launches ENERGY STAR® Mortgage**

Maine homeowners who want to slash their heating and electricity bills and obtain affordable financing for big energy-saving home improvements can apply for an ENERGY STAR® Mortgage, under a first-in-the nation program just launched by the Energy Programs Consortium (EPC) and the Maine State Housing Agency.

The ENERGY STAR Mortgage Program is a collaborative effort between EPC, the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state energy and housing agencies, with support from the Ford and Surdna Foundations. Maine is the first state in the country to offer the ENERGY STAR mortgage to consumers under the current program. Additional states, including Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania -- plus the District of Columbia -- are expected to launch the program later this year.

EPC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization conducting policy research and demonstration programs sponsored by the four main organizations representing state energy and regulatory agencies: the National Association of State Energy Officials; the **National Energy Assistance Directors' Association**; the **National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners**; and the **National Association of State and Community Services Programs**. NEADA, NARUC and NASCSP are members of the National Low Income Energy Consortium Board of Directors. — *EPC news release*, February 20, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.energyprograms.org/pr/022009.htm>

In Washington ...

- **President's Budget Proposal Reduces Funding for LIHEAP**

In the budget proposal he submitted to Congress for Fiscal Year 2010, President Barack Obama has recommended a cutback in funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The president recommended an appropriation of \$3.2 billion for LIHEAP compared with funding of \$5.1 billion in the current fiscal year. There also is a proposed trigger mechanism to allow the president to provide automatic increases in energy assistance when there is a spike in home energy prices. The budget document did not outline how the mechanism would work. Here is the language on LIHEAP contained in the president's budget message:

Provides Energy Assistance to Low-income families. The Budget provides \$3.2 billion for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to help low-income families with their home heating and cooling expenses. That is the highest level of LIHEAP funding for any year except for the most recent, when the Nation was threatened with an unprecedented

increase in energy costs. In addition, the Administration proposes creating a new trigger mechanism to provide automatic increases in energy assistance whenever there is a spike in energy costs. The normal appropriations process cannot always respond to the volatile energy market on a timely basis; the trigger will ensure a prompt and potentially significant increase in funds in response to a rapid future rise in costs.

- **Additional Money for LIHEAP Not Included in Economic Stimulus Bill**

The economic stimulus package signed into law by President Barack Obama February 17 did not include additional money for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The \$820 billion House version of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 included \$1 billion for the program. The Senate's \$838 billion version of the stimulus package excluded money for the energy aid program. Despite urging from lawmakers and advocates (see links below), the conference committee that reconciled differences between the two bills removed the LIHEAP money from the package. It does, however, contain \$5 billion for weatherization, \$3.1 billion for state energy programs and \$3.2 billion for energy efficiency and conservation block grants.

Read more at:

<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/feb09/wap.htm>

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29151563>

<http://www.allamericanpatriots.com/economic-stimulus-package/48749892-aarp-conferees-must-include-stimulative-actions-provide-relief-ol>

In the States ...

- **Iowa Board May Revamp Electric Shut-Off Rules**

Weeks after an elderly Michigan man froze to death inside his home after power was interrupted by what is commonly called a service limiter, utility officials in Iowa are looking at rewriting rules that could expand the device's use in the state. The body of 93-year-old Marvin Schur was found in his home by a neighbor January 17. A electricity "limiter" was installed to restrict use to Schur's home four days earlier because he owed the local electric utility more than \$1,000. Now, a state official claims the same thing could happen in Iowa if rules governing the use of service limiters are rewritten. — *Associated Press*, February 4, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.myabc5.com/global/story.asp?s=9787948&ClientType=Printable>

- **Idaho Utility Regulators Seek Change in Law to Help Low-income Customers**

Idaho utility regulators are asking the Legislature to change a state law so utilities can help low-income customers pay their energy bills. The bill is one of several recommendations from the Idaho Public Utilities Commission in response to energy affordability workshops conducted by the commission's staff, utilities and consumer groups. Energy affordability has become an issue for many Idaho residents and businesses, the commission said. The bill would change a law that prevents public utilities from granting "any preference or advantage" in rates. — *Boise (ID) Idaho Statesman*, February 4, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/business/story/656901.html>

In the News ...

Fourth Death Likely Caused by Carbon Monoxide

As people across Kentucky and Southern Indiana continued to dig out from ice and snow after last week's fierce winter storm, a man died yesterday in what was apparently Louisville's fourth death from carbon monoxide poisoning. The man died and his wife was taken to a hospital after the pair attempted to heat their southwestern Jefferson County home with a grill, officials said. About 450,000 homes and businesses across Kentucky remained without power yesterday, state officials said -- 122,000 of them in the Louisville area. To help, Gov. Steve Beshear marshaled the state's entire National Guard -- an unprecedented move. In the Louisville death, rescue workers responded just after midnight to a call in the 4700 block of Poplar View Drive in the Lake Dreamland area and found charcoal in a grill at the foot of a bed, said Dr. Neal Richmond, chief executive and medical director of Louisville Metro EMS. — *Louisville (KY) Courier-Journal*, February 1, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20090201/NEWS01/902010481>

Michigan 93-Year-Old Found Frozen to Death

A 93-year-old Michigan man was found frozen to death in his home January 17. Neighbors found Marvin Schur in his South Chilson home. Bay City Electric had placed a limiter reducing electric power to the house several days earlier in response to Schur's failure to pay his bills. Bay City has since removed an estimated 60 to 70 limiters placed on other homes where rate payers had fallen behind. Schur received a burial with full military honors. Meanwhile, an investigation into his death has been turned over to Michigan State Police. City Manager Robert Belleman says the cause of the sub-freezing temperatures in Schur's home has not been determined. Belleman promised full city cooperation in the case. — *LIHEAP Clearinghouse*, updated February 3, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/feb09/freezing.htm>

Heat-aid Requests Top All Prior Winters

More people have applied for heating assistance in Maine's Kennebec Valley already this winter than any previous entire winter, with many weeks of cold weather expected. The Kennebec Valley Community Action Program has taken more than 11,000 applications this winter, said Kelly LaChance, the agency's assistant energy director. The most applications KVCAP had processed in a winter previously was around 9,500. KVCAP processes applications locally for people seeking help through the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. It also has other emergency heating assistance funds available. On Friday, LaChance told members of a heating assistance group that she anticipates it will receive 14,000 applications by the time KVCAP stops taking applications April 30. — *Augusta (ME) Kennebec Journal*, February 7, 2009

Read more at:

<http://kennebecjournal.maintoday.com/news/local/5918759.html>

· **More Alabama Residents Requesting Energy Bill Assistance**

Due to the economic recession, more Cullman County, Alabama, residents have turned to government-funded assistance to pay their energy bills this winter than in previous years. According to a recent press release, the local non-profit Community Action Partnership has had an overwhelming response to its Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program this winter. "Some of our sites we did doubled in size," said Robin Johnson, Cullman County team leader for the energy program. "And it's a lot of people who have never been in before." — *Cullman (AL) Times*, February 7, 2009

Read more at:

http://www.cullmantimes.com/local/local_story_038205614.html

· **No Shame, Plenty of Determination: Single Mom Describes Daily Struggle**

Florine Serfass of Delaware Water Gap is fighting the financial crunch on her own. A single mother who was laid off because of the faltering economy is fighting an upward battle with credit companies and her mortgage company. Just trying to find employment is not going to cover all the expenses. "I am almost better off on unemployment than taking a part-time job, which is the only thing really being offered right now," Serfass said. — *Stroudsburg (PA) Pocono Record*, February 10, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.poconorecord.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090210/FEATURES/902100308>

· **Dollar Energy Fund Helps People Pay Utilities**

It's called the Dollar Energy Fund, and it was started 25 years ago to help people who just can't pay these ever-rising gas, electric and water bills. The chances are good that you, or a family member, or a neighbor just might need this help this winter, like Helen Gray discovered. "There are many of us out there that we don't know how we're going to get along," a tearful Ms. Gray told KDKA money editor Jon Delano, "and you go around and you turn the lights out and you turn the heat down, and then you're cold. It's really a problem." The 85-year-old Penn Hills woman is just one of thousands of residents who cannot pay these sky-rocketing local utility bills -- from gas, water and electric companies. ... That's where the Dollar Energy Fund comes in. — *KDKA-TV, Pittsburgh*, February 11, 2009

Read more at:

<http://kdka.com/consumer/Dollar.Energy.Fund.2.932985.html>

· **Billions for Weatherization in Stimulus Questioned**

Critics of the \$787 billion economic stimulus program are not really balking over caulking: They just don't think pouring substantially more money into home weatherization will give a quick kick to the reeling economy. There's \$5 billion for weatherizing modest-income homes over the next few years in the sweeping stimulus legislation that Congress hopes to get to President Barack Obama's desk, perhaps as early as this weekend. Obama wants a sevenfold jump in the number of homes weatherized each year — from about 140,000 to 1 million households. But critics argue that much of the new money will be chewed up by the sheer cost of implementing the program and training people to carry it out. Either way, it's a huge increase from the \$447 million that Congress authorized for this purpose in the current budget year. — *Associated Press*, February 13, 2009

Read more at:

http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iOG3Yk-jwqgGCWnZ__ek2Tktc7lgD96AV6Q02

· **Caught on Camera Stealing From Needy, Later Arrested**

A greedy thief was caught on camera stealing cash meant to help keep the needy warm this cold winter. Officials in Attleboro, Massachusetts say it was the second time in months that someone swiped a charity jar from a Dunkin Donuts. The cash was being collected for the charity organization, Helping with Energy Assistance Together. The money would have been used to help the needy. Police say the crook entered the store on Tuesday night and slipped the jar under his jacket when the clerk's back was turned. Authorities say an arrest was made in the case on February 16. — *Attleboro (MA) Sun Chronicle*, February 17, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.thesunchronicle.com/articles/2009/02/17/news/4433103.txt>

· **Government Gets Chance to Prove it Can Work**

For weeks, the economic stimulus package lay in the hands of President Obama and congressional leaders. But with Obama having signed the \$787 billion bill on Tuesday, its fate has been dispersed far and wide – to places such as the state office building in Crownsville, Md., outside Annapolis, where three workers face the challenge of a career. The team oversees the home-weatherization program in Maryland's Department of Housing and Community Development, disbursing \$2.6 million a year in federal funds to cities and community groups to insulate the homes of 1,000 low-income residents. The stimulus package provides \$65 million over two years, enough to cut deep into the waiting list of 22,000 homes. For the team – an administrator, an auditor and a clerk – it is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to prove their worth, albeit amid higher stakes and more scrutiny than they have ever faced. — *Washington Post*, February 23, 2009

Read more at:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/22/AR2009022201759_2.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter

· **Woman Struggles With Electric Bills**

An elderly Ridgeway, Virginia, resident is wondering what Congress can do to alleviate the burden of her skyrocketing electric bill. Martha Brumer, 93, lives on a fixed income. With numerous health concerns, she spends much of her Social Security income to buy medicine. Her modest, three-bedroom home is totally electric, but Brumer said she uses electricity sparingly. For instance, she did not decorate with lights at Christmas, has never used her oven and does not routinely turn on lights throughout the house at night. ... Still, in the three months since the State Corporation Commission approved a 19.3 percent increase for Appalachian Power (APCo), Brumer said her electric bill has soared. — *Martinsville (VA) Bulletin*, February 24, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.martinsvillebulletin.com/article.cfm?ID=17840>

· **PECO Cuts Rates for Natural Gas Customers**

PECO is slashing its natural gas rate by 10 percent on average for its 485,000 suburban gas customers in Pennsylvania, effective March 1, the company said today. Combined with two previous quarterly decreases, the gas commodity portion of PECO's natural gas rate will now be the lowest it has been since December 2003. An average residential heating customer who uses 80 ccf (hundreds of cubic feet) of natural gas a month will now pay about \$109 per month. The gas rate for average usage will drop from \$1.51 per ccf currently to \$1.36 per ccf. Last March, the average PECO customer paid \$1.47 per ccf. Actual usage depends on a customer's billing cycle, number of gas appliances, weather, and the size and energy efficiency of the home. — *Primos (PA) Delaware County Times*, February 25, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.delcotimes.com/articles/2009/02/25/business/doc49a582e81b7a6489239428.txt>

Editorials ...

State Relief

The federal economic stimulus bill, currently undergoing a reshaping in the Senate, is seen by the states as welcome relief for their budgets. Even Republican governors meeting over the weekend for the most part were hopeful that a stimulus package would pass Congress. Not a single Republican member supported the \$819 billion package that passed the U.S. House last week, but the governors saw it differently. Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour expressed concern about strings that might be attached to stimulus funds, and accurately cited some of the elements of the House bill as overreaching on social spending with dubious merit. But even Barbour has been measured in his criticism, and when House Speaker Billy McCoy questioned his comments about possibly refusing some of the funds, the governor clarified the point to suggest he probably wouldn't have a problem with most of what the state is likely to get. — *Tupelo (MS) Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal*, February 4, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.djournal.com/pages/story.asp?ID=285487&pub=1&div=Opinion>

Commentaries ...

Home Insulation Plan Would Aid Economy

First, do no harm. That maxim has guided physicians for thousands of years. An economic stimulus should reduce the risk of a long-term economic crisis, but it should not make our energy crisis worse. A major investment in home weatherization might lack support from lobbyists and interest groups, but it will meet both policy goals. It will provide a prompt economic stimulus while reducing dependence on foreign energy sources and greenhouse gas emissions. It will provide local jobs, supporting small businesses and encouraging creation of new ones. It will save money for home owners and renters, staving off foreclosures, allowing more discretionary spending and possibly preventing homelessness. — Thomas Dietz in the *Detroit News*, February 2, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090202/OPINION01/902020323/1008/OPINION01>

Vanishing Utility Safety Nets

Two crucial safety nets designed to protect vulnerable families will disappear on April 1. That's when the winter moratorium ends and utilities will again be allowed to shut off service to low-income customers, and when the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which provides cash grants to help pay for heat and crisis grants to help with heating emergencies, will also end. At the end of the moratorium two years ago, 40,000 statewide customers who were in arrears were shut off. A year ago, 60,000 were. If this trend continues, we can look ahead to 90,000 this year. But things are different now due to the troubled economy. Low-income families are facing much more difficult circumstances and most probably will be substantially more behind in their bills than in previous years. — John Rowe in the *Philadelphia Daily News*, February 19, 2009

Read more at:

http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20090219_Vanishing_utility_safety_nets.html

Landlords Part of LIHEAP Equation

A Petersburg man took a strong stand last week on government-funded insulation of houses available for rent here and elsewhere by making the following qualified statements. If the landlord has got the money to insulate the house, why are we spending federal money to help “deadbeat” landlords? We all know the efficiency of the federal government. As it turns out, administrators of a federal weatherization program can't discriminate between those who rent and those in owner-occupied homes, and the purpose is to help folks who, without insulation, are needlessly spending more than they would on gas, electricity, propane or other fuels to heat their homes this winter. — Clint Confehr in *Lewisburg (TN) Marshall County Tribune*, February 27, 2009

Read more at:

<http://www.marshalltribune.com/story/1506061.html>

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