



NLIEC NEWS, March 31, 2009

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*Within the Energy Assistance Community ...*

· **New Jersey SHARES Opens New Call Center**

New Jersey SHARES opened a new call center in March to provide information on a variety of assistance programs for low-income people, as well as individuals and families in the midst of a temporary financial crisis. The new call center, which New Jersey SHARES is operating on behalf of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, kicked off with staff who have been specially trained to offer a broad array of program information to households that are struggling to pay their utility bills. The call center will provide information about the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, home weatherization and the Universal Service Program for gas and electric assistance. Callers who do not qualify for these programs will be referred to 866-NJSHARES. New Jersey SHARES is a member of the National Low Income Energy Consortium Board of Directors.

· **Nebraska Network Holds Energy Affordability Symposium**

Stakeholders from throughout Nebraska gathered on March 27 for a symposium on home energy affordability conducted by the Nebraska Energy Assistance Network. The one-day event featured two keynote speakers: Roger Colton of Fisher, Sheehan and Colton in Belmont, MASS, and David Carroll of APPRISE in Princeton, NJ. Both are well respected within the energy assistance community. Colton first conducted a workshop on national versus local home energy affordability. In the keynote address that followed, he examined what states other than Nebraska are doing to collaboratively address energy, poverty and its impact on affordable housing. Carroll, who has more than 20 years of experience developing research on the energy needs of low-income households and conducting evaluations of programs to meet those needs, addressed symposium attendees on integrated solutions to energy affordability problems.

*In Washington ...*

· **Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition Co-chairs Seek More Money for LIHEAP**

The co-chairs of the Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition are urging their House colleagues to provide \$5.1 billion in funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance

Program in Fiscal Year 2010, even though President Obama has recommended a smaller amount. Representatives James Oberstar (D-MN) and John McHugh (R-NY), along with Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA) — who chairs the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming — are circulating a letter to House appropriators seeking the higher funding level for LIHEAP in FY 2010. The president's recommended budget for FY 2010 included \$3.2 billion for the program, covering both regular block grants and emergency contingency funds. The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, meanwhile, estimates that if the president's budget recommendation is approved by Congress, an estimated 1.5 million families would be eliminated from the program and grants would be reduced.

### *In the States ...*

#### · **Four States Extend Energy Assistance and Shutoff Moratoria Deadlines**

The application period for Iowa's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program has been extended from April 15 until May 29. In Connecticut, meanwhile, the Department of Social Services extended by two weeks — through March 31 — its deadline for fuel authorizations to help residents with the cost of deliverable heating fuels. On March 11, the Maryland Public Service Commission ordered two utilities, Pepco and Baltimore Gas & Electric, to delay shutting off gas or electricity service for one week until April 7. And the Michigan Public Service Commission, following a request from Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm, extended existing shutoff protection from March 31 until April 30. — *LIHEAP Clearinghouse*, March 16 and 30, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/mar09/shutoffs.htm>>  
<<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/mar09/application.htm>>

### *In the News ...*

#### · **Utility Shut-Off Notices Surging**

Utilities across the Washington region have sent out millions of notices to customers who have fallen behind on their gas and electric bills in the past year and are increasingly shutting off service as residents find that they cannot pay rising heating costs. In Maryland, alarmed regulators ordered utility officials to appear at a hearing yesterday to explain what's going on. A state program funded by ratepayers and designed to give one-time, crisis assistance to low-income customers ran out of money early last year, and state officials put in \$27 million in tax revenue to meet the need. Maryland taxpayers are on track to contribute an additional \$90 million this year. — *Washington Post*, February 27, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/26/AR2009022603735.html>>

#### · **Consumer Cost Holds Despite Natural Gas Price Decrease**

Joann Stoddard, 79, isn't surprised to see her home gas bill go up in the wintertime. However, she was surprised to learn that her gas bill is staying high this winter while the wholesale price of natural gas is going down. "Well, I guess we can be glad to have a little bit milder winter," Stoddard said. The wholesale price of natural gas, which is pumped to residential and commercial properties and burned for heating, dropped by about 35 percent from March 2008 to December 2008, according to Moffat County's account of a local well's proceeds. In that time, Atmos Energy, which city records show is the sole gas utility provider in Craig, has issued two rate increases totaling 24 percent. — *Craig (CO) Daily Press*, March 3, 2009

Read more at: <[http://www.craigdailynews.com/news/2009/mar/03/consumer\\_cost\\_holds\\_despite\\_natural\\_gas\\_price\\_decr/](http://www.craigdailynews.com/news/2009/mar/03/consumer_cost_holds_despite_natural_gas_price_decr/)>

· **Pacific Power Offers Help to Struggling Customers**

During a February 25, 2009 reception hosted by Pacific Power for Creswell and Cottage Grove community leaders, company president Pat Reiten urged customers experiencing difficulty paying their electricity bills to contact a company customer service representative for assistance. He invited customers suffering financial hardship to contact Pacific Power to discuss the special services, bill assistance and time payment plans the company offers. An equal payment plan can help stabilize bills; if the customer has fallen behind, a payment plan can be put in place to avoid disconnection; and, if the situation involves severe financial hardship, the customer can be referred to Oregon HEAT, an energy assistance organization to which Pacific Power donates. — *Creswell (OR) Chronicle*, March 4, 2009

Read more at: <[http://www.thecreswellchronicle.com/news/story.cfm?story\\_no=6376](http://www.thecreswellchronicle.com/news/story.cfm?story_no=6376)>

· **Bill Assistance Programs See Increase as Energy Cost Rises**

Economically, times are getting more difficult for area residents as utility rates have increased more than 22 percent since 2005. In response, state federal agencies have increased their efforts to relieve the pressure. Evelyn Blackman, a spokeswoman for Catholic Charities Inc., a nonprofit organization that administers the Delaware Energy Assistance Program through the Division of State Service centers, said federal funding for such bill assistance programs has risen by more than \$10 million to meet rising demand. — *Rehoboth Beach (DE) Delaware Coast Press*, March 5, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.delmarvanow.com/article/20090305/DCP01/903050344>>

· **Mother, Daughter Killed In Fatal Fire**

A mother and daughter have been killed in an overnight house fire in Philadelphia's Point Breeze section. The mother is identified as 29-year old Keisha Jackson. ... Two other children and an adult male are recovering in the hospital. Philadelphia Fire Commissioner Lloyd Ayers says investigators are looking into whether an illegal electrical hook-up triggered the blaze. He says the family was using car jumper cables to connect directly to a powerline. — *WTXF-TV, Philadelphia*, March 5, 2009

Read more at: <[http://www.myfoxphilly.com/dpp/news/Point\\_Breeze\\_Fatal\\_Fire\\_03\\_05\\_09](http://www.myfoxphilly.com/dpp/news/Point_Breeze_Fatal_Fire_03_05_09)>

· **84,000 Households At Risk of Utility Shut-offs**

Nearly 84,000 households with delinquent utility bills could see their power shut off by Baltimore Gas and Electric Co. starting next month, when restrictions meant to protect customers during cold winter months end, the state's top energy regulator warned. Douglas Nazarian, chairman of the state's Public Service Commission, called the situation facing consumers a "potential tsunami," as many residents have seen their utility bills rise, and in some cases double. In all of last year, about 36,000 BGE customers had their service terminated. "April will be a disaster if we don't start looking into this," Nazarian said. "The problem is going to grow." — *Baltimore Sun*, March 6, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.baltimoresun.com/business/baltimore.utilities06mar06,0,4142701.story>>

· **Palin Rejects Over 30% of Stimulus Money**

Governor Sarah Palin is refusing to accept over 30 percent of the federal economic stimulus money being offered to Alaska, including dollars for schools, energy assistance and social services. The news Thursday drew anger from those who accused Palin of putting her national political aspirations ahead of the state's interests, and admiration from others who say she has courage to turn down money that would expand government. The state Legislature will have an opportunity to override her decision. Palin is not taking about \$288 million of the \$930.7 million that Alaska is due in the federal stimulus. Palin said she is accepting the federal stimulus money that would go for construction projects, but not funding directed at government operations. — *Anchorage (AK) Daily News*, March 19, 2009; UPDATE: *Juneau (AK) Empire*, March 25, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.adn.com/palin/story/729504.html>>  
<[http://www.juneauempire.com/stories/032509/loc\\_414286005.shtml](http://www.juneauempire.com/stories/032509/loc_414286005.shtml)>

· **A Heap of Insulation**

Think of the federal home-weatherization program as a \$5 billion rock. It's about to be tossed into the stimulus pool, and supporters hope the ripples last for years. "We want them to go through Ohio as deeply and as widely as possible," said Phil Cole of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies. The state expects to receive \$267 million to insulate, seal and otherwise improve home energy efficiency for thousands of low-income Ohioans over the next three years. Cole said the government spent less than that on weatherization programs for all 50 states last year. — *Columbus (OH) Dispatch*, March 22, 2009

Read more at: <[http://www.columbusdispatch.com/live/content/local\\_news/stories/2009/03/22/WEATHERIZE.ART\\_ART\\_03-22-09\\_B1\\_ISDA89V.html?sid=101](http://www.columbusdispatch.com/live/content/local_news/stories/2009/03/22/WEATHERIZE.ART_ART_03-22-09_B1_ISDA89V.html?sid=101)>

· **Paying the Bills With Prayers and Phone Calls**

Bernice Fortune shook off her nervousness and took a deep breath. She was about to make the umpteenth call in her quest to keep her lights and heat on. ... Fortune clicked her cellphone shut. "Okay, so that's another 40, so I'm down to . . ." She looked toward the ceiling. "Forty-nine dollars and 85 cents. That's all I need, Lord." It had been like that all week for Fortune, 58, of Dumfries. She had spent four days making phone calls and visiting churches and social service agencies, trying to piece together enough money to pay her electric bill, which was about three months behind. That Friday, she stood in the lobby of a Dumfries nonprofit agency, glasses low on her nose and the Yellow Pages in front of her, ticking off the names of places that might be able to help. — *Washington Post*, March 23, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/22/AR2009032202083.html?nav=hcmoduletmv>>

· **D.C. Lawmakers Discuss Charging Residents for Street Lights**

Lawmakers in the District of Columbia are discussing the possibility of charging residents for the use of street lights. Now, when the sun goes down and streetlights turn on, residents' home electric bills could go up every month to pay for those lights. City leaders say to cover the \$13

million it costs to operate and maintain the District's street lights, the mayor is proposing a monthly "street light user" fee that would be tacked onto residents' monthly PEPCO electric bills. The fee would be \$4.25 a month for residents, \$16.75 a month for businesses and \$42 a month for everyone else. For residents, the added cost would total up to \$51 per year. As it stands now, everyone would pay the same no matter home size or income level, though some relief for low- or fixed-income residents might be provided by the city's Energy Assistance Office. — *WJLA-TV*, March 24, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.wjla.com/news/stories/0309/606569.html>>

### · **Man Helps Couple Pay Utility Bill**

Rockton residents Tony and Pam Poden were preparing for the likelihood that their electric and gas utilities would be shut off Wednesday. But someone has come to their rescue. "I've been there before," Oregon resident Delvin Bausman said. "When I was about 40 years old, my wife and I had five kids, I didn't have a high-paying job and it was an awfully tough time. I'm not a wealthy man, I have a little bit of a retirement, but it hit my heart when I saw the picture of this family and I thought I need to help them out. Everybody has to help somebody." Bausman, 75, wants to pay Rock Energy Cooperative the \$225 the Poden's need to keep their power on. — *Rockford (IL) Register Star*, March 30, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.rrstar.com/communities/x1525905017/Options-available-to-avoid-utility-shutoffs>>

### *Editorials ...*

#### · **This Year's Cold War**

When we heard the commonwealth last week was about to close the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) earlier than in years past, with money left unspent, we scratched our heads. In the worst economic downturn in at least a generation, with new federal policies designed to get money flowing to those in need, why would the state make a decision that could add to the pain for struggling families? Fortunately, Pennsylvania Gov. Rendell must have seen the illogic of the move, and yesterday announced that the state will extend the program by a week, in order to spend the \$6.6 million that it had been intending to hold over until next year. — *Philadelphia Daily News*, March 10, 2009

Read more at: <[http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20090310\\_Webhed\\_goes\\_here.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20090310_Webhed_goes_here.html)>

### *Commentaries ...*

#### · **Past Mistakes are Stone Around Couple's Neck**

While a lot of attention has been paid to people who are in danger of losing their homes, not so much has been paid to their poorer cousins — the people in danger of losing their apartments. Greg and Vikki Zahirny live in a large apartment complex in St. Peters. Greg is 48. Vikki is a little older. This is the second marriage for each. They met 20 years ago in Pennsylvania when they were working for a company that made solar panels. ... When the company went out of business, Greg and Vikki found other jobs. ... But nothing worked out long-term, and in 2003, they moved to the St. Louis area. ... They'd work if they could. Instead, they're waiting for the next John Steinbeck to chronicle their lives. The new Joads. They're all around us. — Bill McClellan in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 4, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/columnists.nsf/billmcclellan/story/41C8B977DA2E82B78625756F0007B665?OpenDocument>>

· **Mother, Quadriplegic Son Fall Behind on Power Bill, Face Shutoff**  
Joyce Owens' son, Chris, is a quadriplegic. He has been on a ventilator for 12 years, as the result of a one-car accident 12 years ago. Another man in the car, Daryl Lehmann, was killed. Joyce and a caregiver take care of Chris at Joyce's home near Chatham. Joyce owes Chatham's utility company about \$12,000. On Wednesday, unless something happens to stop it, the village of Chatham will shut off Joyce's electricity. If the village cuts the power, what will become of Chris, who is 39 years old? Joyce says she probably will call an ambulance and have Chris hospitalized. Nobody knows who would pay the hospital bill, but at least her son would be alive. — Dave Bakke in the *Springfield (IL) State Journal Register*, March 26, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.sj-r.com/homepage/x2030331037/Dave-Bakke-Quadriplegic-mother-to-lose-power>>

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