

NLIEC News

September 30, 2009

Within the Energy Assistance Community ...

• **NLIEC and NFFN Partnering in “Faces of Energy Assistance” Project**

The National Low Income Energy Consortium and the **National Fuel Funds Network**, a member of the NLIEC Board of Directors, are joining forces to develop a new resource to help our members tell the story of energy assistance. Their new joint project, called “Faces of Energy Assistance” or the “Faces Project” for short, is intended to accomplish two objectives: 1) to serve as a member resource, providing a state-by-state compendium of “real life” examples of how energy assistance programs make a difference in the lives of people in need, and 2) to serve as a resource for news media seeking contact with “real people” who benefit from federal, state and private energy assistance. The “Faces Project” will be developed with the input of our members and posted on the NFFN, NLIEC and National Energy and Utility Affordability Conference websites before the first of the year.

We first plan to launch the “People” component of the Faces Project, which would contain real stories of energy assistance recipients listed by state or territory. This will be a simple and convenient tool to help decision makers gain a better understanding of both why energy assistance is needed and how people have been helped by energy assistance programs. People whose “success stories” appear in the Faces Project would be identified only by their initials and location unless they have given you written permission to use their names. We would also like to have as many photos of willing energy-assistance recipients as possible. This is, after all, a “faces” project. We would like to have a broad representation of “real life” stories posted on our websites by the end of the year, in time for use in conjunction with NFFN’s LIHEAP Action Day.

By the second half of 2010, we plan to add a second component to serve as a resource for the media. It will list agencies that are able and willing to refer clients who have agreed to talk to reporters. It will be organized by state and territory, listing participating energy assistance providers who have compiled lists of assistance beneficiaries willing to speak with the media. The names and contact information for energy-assistance beneficiaries will not appear on the websites. Rather, the list for a particular agency will show various categories of energy assistance beneficiaries for whom the agency has clients willing to talk to reporters.

We hope you will be willing to participate so that we can make the Faces of Energy Assistance as comprehensive and compelling a resource as it possibly can be. Material for the Faces Project should be sent via e-mail either to David Fox of NLIEC (dfox@nliec.org

<<mailto:dfox@nliec.org>>) or George Coling of NFFN (coling@nationalfuelfunds.org <<mailto:coling@nationalfuelfunds.org>>).

- **Be a Critic: Rate Best Drive \$marter Challenge Videos!**

It's been said that "everyone's a critic." Now's your chance to play that role by rating the 10 finalists in the Drive \$marter Challenge video contest sponsored by the **Alliance to Save Energy**, a member of the National Low Income Energy Consortium Board of Directors, and its 16 partners. Among them are NLIEC and the National Fuel Funds Network. Rating the contenders is both fun and easy! All you have to do is go to <<http://drivesmarterchallenge.org/contest>> , watch the 10 short finalist videos and rate any or all of them on a scale of 1 to 5. The website software does the rest, and you might even pick up some new money-saving ideas! Public voting will determine which of the finalists get the \$5,000 grand prize and three other exciting prizes. In addition to casting your own votes, don't hesitate to "lobby" for your favorites on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, personal blogs or websites, and any other social networks in which you participate. You have until 11:59 pm on Monday, October 19 to vote for your favorite video.

- **New Jersey SHARES to Hold "Night with the NJ Devils"**

New Jersey SHARES, a member of the NLIEC Board of Directors, will hold a special "Night with the New Jersey Devils" on Friday, January 29, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. NJ SHARES' supporters to be able to take advantage of discounted tickets for the National Hockey League team's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs at the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey, to help celebrate the difference the organization's programs make for people in need. New Jersey SHARES will also be on the concourse to share materials and information with sports fans and friends.

- **South Jersey Gas Donates \$100,000 to NJ SHARES**

South Jersey Gas donated an additional \$100,000 to New Jersey SHARES this month to provide energy assistance to New Jersey households in need. The contribution underscores South Jersey Gas' commitment to helping its customers during difficult economic times. "Many New Jersey residents are walking a financial tightrope each month as they try to maintain their household in the face of rising costs and shrinking income," said Jeff DuBois, chief operating officer of South Jersey Gas. "NJ SHARES builds a bridge for individuals and families across a difficult situation and ensures they receive the assistance needed." South Jersey Gas has been a strong supporter of New Jersey SHARES since the organization's inception in 1998, said Jim Jacob, the nonprofit's executive director.

- **BGE Joins in Launching Baltimore Neighborhood Energy Challenge**

Baltimore Gas & Electric Company, a member of the NLIEC Board of Directors, along with its parent Constellation Energy and the City of Baltimore have joined in launching the Baltimore Neighborhood Energy Challenge, a nine-month pilot program designed to raise awareness, reduce residential energy use, stimulate demand for energy conservation services and learn lessons on how to motivate behavior change related to reducing residential energy use. Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon announced Constellation's \$500,000 investment in the initiative for a cleaner Baltimore during its launch in August. Of Constellation's investment, \$200,000

will go toward implementation of the neighborhood initiative, while the remainder will go toward doubling the tree canopy in Baltimore over the next 30 years. The Challenge will be implemented in nine neighborhoods, reflecting all income levels across the city. “The Baltimore Neighborhood Energy Challenge supports Baltimore Gas and Electric Company’s strong commitment to energy conservation and energy efficiency,” said BGE President and Chief Executive Officer Ken DeFontes. “BGE will partner with the Baltimore Neighborhood Energy Challenge to perform energy usage analysis with participating customers to see energy savings within the home, neighborhood and city and compare it to historical energy data to those in and out of the pilot. With this energy analysis, BGE will be working very closely with the Baltimore Office of Sustainability on lessons learned to hopefully expand Baltimore Neighborhood Energy Challenge citywide.”

- **Ohio Utility to Spend \$8.5 Million Through Fuel Fund**

Low-income customers of FirstEnergy Corp. can receive up to \$500 in assistance with their electric bills through the new Ohio Fuel Fund Grant Program. The program will provide financial assistance to about 42,000 FirstEnergy Corp. electrical customers in northern and central Ohio over the next three years. FirstEnergy has set aside \$8.5 million to fund the program following two state agreements over rate-related cases. Customers of FirstEnergy’s utility companies — Ohio Edison, Cleveland Electric Illuminating and Toledo Edison — may qualify for the program. FirstEnergy has about 926,000 customers in Ohio. — **LIHEAP**

Clearinghouse, September 9, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/sept09/oh.htm>>

- **Massachusetts Fuel Fund Surpasses Fundraising Goal**

The Massachusetts Good Neighbor Energy Fund’s 2008-2009 “Give the Gift of Warmth” campaign surpassed its goal of \$650,000 by raising \$884,199 for energy assistance. Bay State residents generously donated funds that were matched by energy companies during an economic crisis that most had never experienced. The Good Neighbor Energy Fund (GNEF) is a statewide cooperative effort of energy companies, their customers and The Salvation Army that started in 1985 to help families who have not qualified for federal and state assistance programs and need assistance paying their energy bills. To qualify for assistance from the GNEF, an applicant’s gross household income must fall between 60 and 80 percent of the state’s median income levels. The fund provided energy assistance to over 2,700 families with a maximum payment of \$300 during the 2008-2009 heating season. For more information, visit <<http://www.magoodneighbor.org>> . — **LIHEAP Clearinghouse, September 24, 2009**

In Washington ...

- **Action Pending on Continuing Resolution to Fund Federal Programs Including LIHEAP**

The United States Senate was poised to act today on a short-term continuing resolution to temporarily fund federal programs including the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, just hours before the end of the fiscal year at midnight. The House voted on September 25 to approve the resolution, which includes additional funding for veterans’ health care and the Census Bureau. All other federal agencies would operate under fiscal 2009

funding levels until their appropriations bills are passed or the continuing resolution expires on October 31. In June, the House of Representatives passed the Fiscal Year 2010 Labor-HHS Appropriations bill providing \$5.1 billion for LIHEAP. The Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee reported a bill with the same amount of LIHEAP funding to the Senate floor in July, but the full Senate has not acted on the measure. Advocates believed the continuing resolution will contain \$5.1 billion for LIHEAP, but it is as yet unclear how long much funding would be released for the program under the resolution.

· **FERC Chief Says U.S. Climate Bill Should Not Delay Grid Overhaul**

U.S. lawmakers should not let climate change legislation delays hold up proposals to overhaul the nation's outdated electricity grid, a top energy regulator said. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee approved a comprehensive energy package this year that would give the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission the authority override state objections to expanding electricity transmission lines. "I would hope the Senate would consider looking at a (transmission) bill separately, if in fact the climate bill does seem to be stalled," FERC Chairman Jon Wellinghoff told reporters after addressing a "smart grid" event in Washington. He said additional federal government oversight was necessary to ensure transmission lines are updated and expanded to connect renewable energy sources in remote locations to urban populations. — *Reuters*, September 11, 2009

· **Salazar Ends Controversial Royalty in Kind Program**

United States Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has announced that he is reforming and restructuring the department's management of U.S. energy resources, starting with the termination of the Minerals Management Service's controversial Royalty in Kind program that accepts oil and natural gas from producers in lieu of cash royalties. In testimony to the House Natural Resources Committee, Salazar described administrative actions he is taking to develop a comprehensive energy strategy on U.S. public lands and the Outer Continental Shelf. "Clearly, the Department's energy leasing and royalty programs have not been working as they should and the American people have not been receiving the full benefits from these valuable assets," Salazar said. "After a thorough review of the controversial Royalty in Kind program, I am today announcing a phased-in termination of the program and an orderly transition over time to a more transparent and accountable royalty collection program." — *Department of Interior news release*, September 16, 2009

Read more at: \ <http://www.doi.gov/news/09_News_Releases/091609.html>

· **Matsui Introduces Legislation to Help Low-Income Americans Subscribe to the Internet**

Representative Doris O. Matsui, a member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet, introduced legislation to expand the Universal Service Fund's Lifeline Assistance program for universal broadband adoption. The bill, the Broadband Affordability Act of 2009, directs the Federal Communications Commission to establish a broadband program that provides low-income Americans living in rural and urban areas with assistance in subscribing to affordable broadband internet service. "To fully close the digital divide we must address the affordability of broadband services for lower-income households. Although these households may have

some options for broadband access, they are underserved if none of these options are affordable,” said Congresswoman Matsui. OSBD News, September 24, 2009

Read more at: <http://www.obsnews.com/news/article100636_matsui-introduces-legislation-help-low-income-americans-subscribe-internet>

In the States ...

- **Michigan PSC Provides \$69 Million in Low-Income Energy Grants**

The Michigan Public Service Commission has issued two orders approving \$69 million in low-income energy grants to various organizations around the state for the fiscal year beginning October 1. The grants are part of the Low-Income and Energy Efficiency Fund (LIEE), which provides energy bill assistance for low-income customers and promotes the efficient use of energy by all customer classes. Since 2002, the MPSC has awarded LIEE funds yearly for low-income energy programs. The amount released to date is over \$500 million. — *LIHEAP Clearinghouse*, September 16, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/sept09/mi.htm>>

- **Tennessee Governor Launches FindHelpTN to Provide Information for State Programs**

Gov. Phil Bredesen this week unveiled FindHelpTN, a Web-based eligibility screening tool designed to connect Tennesseans with social service programs and resources. “Anyone who has tried to help someone find or apply for social service programs knows how challenging the process can be,” Bredesen said. “FindHelpTN provides case workers, advocates, clergy or family members and individuals themselves with access to a single source of information to identify programs for which someone may qualify.” FindHelpTN is a centralized source of information for state and federal assistance programs that includes eligibility screening, application instructions and localized location information for the administering agency. — *Associated Press*, September 24, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.nwtntoday.com/news.php?viewStory=31896>>

In the News ...

- **Iowa LIHEAP Leader Skeptical of Predictions of Lower Heating Bills**

The man who heads up the program that provides heating assistance to low-income Iowans is reluctant to get overly excited about predictions of lower heating bills this winter. Jerry McKim leads the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and says he’s skeptical that natural gas prices will stay low. McKim says he’ll believe it when he sees it, and it’s not so much the natural gas prices, but the heating bill. McKim says lower natural gas prices don’t always translate into lower heating bills. “If the bill is actually lower this winter than last winter, of course that’ll be welcome relief to a large segment of our population here that simply cannot afford what’s become a basic necessity,” McKim says. — *Radio Iowa*, September 9, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.radioiowa.com/2009/09/09/liheap-leader-skeptical-of-predictions-of-lower-heating-bills/>>

- **Customers Feel Pinch of Pricier Propane**

Propane costs are going up, just in time for winter. The increase is tied to the stock market, prices set by big oil companies and the amount of reserve propane left in storage, according to the Energy Information Association. The current cause for the increase is something of a puzzlement for Elton Koepp, manager for King Butane in Moriarty, New Mexico. His price per gallon, which seems to be typical of other providers, has gone to \$1.75, up by 20 cents in the last month. Koepp was told it had to do with the stock market, but he isn't willing to get behind that explanation. "They can't even tell me why they're going up on their prices right now," he said. "More or less, they don't know." Whatever the cause of the increase, he said he sees people struggling with their bills. Although he hasn't lost customers, he said people are simply doing without propane during difficult times. — *Moriarty (NM) Mountain View Telegraph*, September 10, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.emtelegraph.com/index.php/news/1898-Customers-Feel-Pinch-Of-Pricier-Propane.html>>

· **Low-income Families Spending More for Shelter and Utilities, Less for Food**

Emko, 21, one of the only two breadwinners in a family of five, feels like she is working not so much to feed her family but to meet her monthly utility and rental payments. She disclosed to Saipan Tribune that every payday, less than \$150 of her wages is allotted to buy food; the rest of her earnings go to pay for utilities and housing. Emko, who has been working in the private sector for a year now, and her brother are the only ones in their family with jobs. Although they live in the government-run MIHA housing in Garapan, they need to allot \$105 for monthly rental and \$67 per month for telephone service. The biggest chunk goes to utilities, which cost up to \$250 a month. "Every time we talk about our income, there's only one obvious thing: we're paying more for these other items than the food we must prioritize," she told Saipan Tribune, expressing frustration with the current state of the island's economy. — *Saipan Tribune*, September 15, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.saipantribune.com/newsstory.aspx?newsID=93556&cat=1>>

· **Thousands of Pennsylvanians Losing Jobless Benefits Statewide**

More than 600 people in York and Adams counties are expected to lose unemployment benefits this weekend, as basic, emergency and extended benefits totaling 79 weeks begin coming to an end. Statewide, an estimated 23,400 people will no longer receive unemployment benefits. "This is the first large wave of those claimants," said Patrick Beaty, deputy secretary for unemployment compensation programs for the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. The reason that such a large wave exists is in part because of the way unemployment benefits have been extended during the recession. — *York (PA) Daily Record*, September 16, 2009

Read more at: <http://ydr.inyork.com/ci_13351693>

· **Report: Fossil Fuels' Subsidies Far Outpace Renewables'**

The U.S. government delivered more than twice as many federal dollars to research initiatives, tax incentives and other programs benefiting fossil fuels than it supplied to renewable energy from 2002 to 2008, according to a report released Friday by two public policy groups. Over that seven-year period, government subsidies to fossil fuels such as oil, coal and natural gas totaled about \$72 billion, according to the study by the Woodrow Wilson

International Center for Scholars and the Environmental Law Institute. The center is a non-partisan think tank and the institute describes itself as a non-partisan research group that aims to strengthen environmental safeguards. The analysis comes as Congress considers an Obama administration proposal to slash tax incentives for the oil and natural gas industry. It could add fodder to arguments from environmentalists and their allies on Capitol Hill that the tax breaks the White House has targeted for elimination are giveaways to an industry that doesn't need the help. — *Houston Chronicle*, September 19, 2009

Read more at: <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/business/6626252.html>

· **SoundBite Maximizes Enrollments for Low Income Energy Assistance Programs**

SoundBite Communications Inc. today announced the SoundBite LIHEAP Enrollment solution, a new proactive customer communications solution for energy and utility providers offering Low Income Home Assistance Programs (LIHEAP) and Weatherization Assistance Programs (WAP) to low-income households. These federally funded programs subsidize home energy bills and reduce costs through household energy efficiency measures. SoundBite's on-demand, multi-channel communications solution maximizes program enrollment rates at a lower cost per enrollment than traditional communications. Rising payment delinquencies and regulatory initiatives are driving utilities to re-evaluate their low income assistance strategies. With a 4.5 billion dollar appropriation included in the 2009 stimulus bill, also known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, utilities are financially motivated to increase consumer participation in LIHEAP and WAP. — *Trading Markets*, September 23, 2009

Read more at: <http://www.tradingmarkets.com/.site/news/Stock%20News/2543003/>

· **Weak Economy = Lower Heating Costs**

That chill in the air this morning is a sure sign winter is approaching. The good news is the cost of staying warm this winter should be significantly less than last heating season. The economic recession has weakened industrial demand for oil and natural gas and that, in turn, has sent prices tumbling for most heating fuels. Natural gas, which heats nearly six out of 10 homes in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, has fallen to its lowest level since 2001, the federal Energy Information Administration said earlier this month. At the same time, natural gas in storage is expected to approach a record of more than 3.8 trillion cubic feet by the end of October, the EIA said. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 29, 2009

Read more at: <http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090928/BIZ01/909290338/Weak+economy+=+lower+heating+costs>

Commentaries ...

· **In Dark Times, FPL Turns Out Lights and Turns Up the Heat**

Wilfredo Blanco clutched his overdue FPL bill, the one that said "final notice before power is turned off," and walked into the office at the end of the hall. "I've never asked the government for nothing," said Blanco, of Southwest Ranches. "But because of my kids my back is against the wall." This was Friday morning at the Broward Community Action Agency in Lauderdale Lakes, where the desperate come for emergency grants up to \$300 for their electric bills. Blanco, 52, is a single father of seven, ages 2-17. He lost his job three months ago. He owes FPL \$457.30, and the utility has given him an extension until Sept. 17 before it disconnects

service. Blanco walked out empty-handed on Friday, told he needed to call for an appointment to have his case reviewed. — Michael Mayo in the *Ford Lauderdale (FL) Sun Sentinel*, September 5, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/broward/sfl-fpl-struggle-mayocol-b090609,0,3362111.column>>

Wind Alone is Not the Answer

Habib Dagher and Governor King make compelling arguments for offshore wind energy. However, I am very skeptical about the continued use of taxpayer money to fund energy experiments like ethanol and off shore wind. Off-shore wind energy, like ethanol before it, has the potential to gobble up billions in taxpayer money and provide very little in return. Your article makes a misleading reference regarding the efficiency of nuclear power to offshore wind power. Mr. Dagher suggests that offshore wind energy could provide 5,000 MW where as nuclear could only deliver 1,000 MW. Mr. Dagher omits one very important question: “What are the costs to develop 5000 MW of offshore wind energy versus 5000 MW of nuclear?” The answer is overwhelmingly obvious — nuclear is a much cheaper and much more efficient source of energy. If it is cheaper and just as clean to produce 5000 MW of nuclear shouldn't we pursue that as opposed to throwing billions of taxpayer money toward a technology that is unproven? — Dean Scontras in the *Kennebunk (ME) York County Coast Star*, September 24, 2009

Read more at: <<http://www.seacoastonline.com/articles/20090924-OPINION-909240364>>

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