



## *National Fuel Funds Network*

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August 2, 2011

### Statement of Tom Stovall

Chairman of the Board of Directors

National Fuel Funds Network

I am here on Capitol Hill today with other supporters of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to urge Congress again to provide \$5.1 billion for the coming fiscal year for America's front-line federal energy assistance program; LIHEAP.

We have chosen to come to Washington in August for the NFFN's Summer LIHEAP Action Day in part to remind our elected representatives that energy assistance is a year-round need. Just as it is important for families to maintain utility services in the cold of winter it is equally important to have those services in the heat of summer.

This point could not be more evident than it is this summer when temperatures have soared into triple digits and stayed there in many parts of the country. Sustained hot weather has led to at least 64 heat related deaths in 15 states. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, heat related illnesses killed more Americans in the last 10 years than hurricanes, tornadoes, lightening and earthquakes combined.

Now as many people turn to LIHEAP for help with mounting energy bills resulting from the oppressive summer weather, they are finding that cooling assistance programs have already been exhausted, reduced or even eliminated.

In Wisconsin, the energy assistance program has turned away 80 percent of the applicants for aid.

In Indiana, the program is accepting no new applicants and only providing aid to people who had received winter heating assistance.

In Oklahoma, where the state had budgeted \$22 million for cooling aid, the program closed after three days because it had run out of money.

In Texas, traditional heat advisories have given way to excessive heat warnings. Daily heat index values could approach or exceed 110 degrees this week. Temperatures have passed 100 degrees for each of the last 33 days! What is the federal government doing about this? It's seriously considering cutting its grant to Texas by 76 percent in this than three months.

In Illinois, where more than 700 people died during a 1995 heat wave, state officials announced that there would be no cooling assistance this summer in order to save funds for heating assistance.

In my home state of Iowa, we too have been faced with record setting heat, effecting the health and safety of elderly, low-income and disabled families. Unfortunately, we have no funds to help these households. Our LIHEAP funds have already been used up for the current year to assist families during the winter when we also had unprecedented cold.

These are dire times. The recession has taken a terrible toll on millions of households and the situation is not getting better. This year 8.9 million households received assistance from LIHEAP, many for the first time.

The President has proposed cutting LIHEAP funding in half. If the proposed cuts are enacted more than 3.5 million households, which received help through LIHEAP this year, would receive none next year. Many at-risk senior citizens, the disabled and the working poor with pre-school age children will very likely receive no assistance.

For these reasons, we have come to Washington today to ask our Senators and Representatives to again approve \$5.1 billion in funding for LIHEAP. Any reduction in funding would severely impact the effectiveness of the program and would leave far too many people without aid.

We are all aware of the need to reduce government spending, but it is very hard to understand cutting a program that helps at-risk Americans keep their homes safe and livable.