



National Fuel Funds Network

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Dear Member: With last week's passage in the House of Representatives of an appropriations bill providing a \$500 million increase in LIHEAP funding over last year, attention now turns to the Senate where legislation funding LIHEAP awaits floor action.

The Senate version of the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill keeps LIHEAP funding for FY 2008 at \$2.161 billion the same level as FY 2007. With the Congressional August recess only two weeks away it is uncertain if the legislation will be acted upon before the month long recess begins.

To further complicate the situation, the President Bush has said he would veto the appropriations bill if the House version of the legislation were sent to his desk. The president objects to several increases in funding contained in the bill, including the funding level for LIHEAP. The Senate version of the bill has contains funding increases that were not included in the president's budget request.

The Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill as approved by the House sets funding for LIHEAP at \$2.662 billion, with \$1.98 billion in regular block grant funds and \$682 million in contingency funds.

During the House's consideration of the appropriations bill, Congressman Jeb Hensarling (R-5th/TX) prepared to offer an amendment that would have stricken all LIHEAP funding for the measure. After swift reaction by LIHEAP supporters the Congressman withdrew his amendment.

Meanwhile LIHEAP supporters are still trying to get the White House to release the remaining \$201.52 million in LIHEAP contingency funds. A group of 39 Senators signed a letter to the President urging the release of the funds.

The CEO of the American Association of Retired People (AARP) Bill Novelli wrote to the president asking that the funds be released following a wave of "searing" weather last week. "The safety and security of low income Americans, especially older Americans, should not be compromised. Beyond concerns of widespread personal hardships, ignoring energy assistance needs has proven to be penny-wise and pound-foolish – with a substantial human and economic toll that includes increased heat-related illnesses and deaths, and unanticipated health care costs."

We will continue to monitor the situation and will keep you informed of any Congressional action on the bill.

State Government Actions

- The Oregon House has approved a fee increase for customers of Portland General Electric and PacifiCorp that will be used to fund a low-income energy assistance program. The legislation increases the fee by 17 cents and is expected to raise \$15 million per year for the program.

The program is available to households with incomes at 50 percent or less than the federal poverty level. Last year, the program aided 22,514 households with an average benefit of \$321 per family. It is estimated that the additional funds will allow the program to reach an additional 16,000 families.

Utility Actions

- The Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) has increased the eligibility level for customers to qualify for discounted electric rates. The SMUD board recently approved setting eligibility rates at 200 percent of poverty for customers to qualify for its Energy Assistance Program Rate, which can save customers more than 30 percent on their monthly electric bill and \$1.50 off the \$5 customer charge.
- Catholic Charities and TXU Energy held a “Beat the Heat” event in Fort Worth on July 13, which offered low-income customers a one-stop location where they could get information on energy bill payment assistance and other services offered by the nonprofit organization.

People attending the event received energy efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs as well as information on how to avoid heat-related emergencies.

- The Southern Good Faith Fund has been selected to administer Entergy Arkansas’s Project Deserve, which helps low-income elderly and disabled customers pay their electric bills during times of financial crisis.

Project Deserve had been administered by the American Red Cross for the past 24 years but is now dedicating all of its resources to disaster relief, response training and military casework. The Southern Good Faith Fund, a nonprofit affiliate of Southern Bancorp, has over the years helped thousands of families in Arkansas and Mississippi in owning their own home, starting a small business or paying college tuition.

Reports and Surveys

- An estimated 1.2 million households have been disconnected from electric and gas service during the period stretching from March to May of this year, according to a survey conducted by the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA).

The survey showed that on average the households owed about \$850 and the total amount owed exceeds \$1 billion. The complete survey is available on the NEADA website -- www.neada.org.

- America's Second Harvest has released its "Almanac of Hunger and Poverty in America 2007," which contains national and state-by-state data on hunger and poverty. The report is available at America's Second Harvest's website – www.secondharvest.org.

Energy Efficiency Education Tools

- Project Energy Savers is taking orders for the 2008 calendar. The award winning calendars are packed with energy saving tips and information and are available in both English and Spanish. More information and price lists are available at the Project Energy Savers website – www.projectenergysavers.com.

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