



National Fuel Funds Network

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Member Letter

Dear NFFN Member: The fight for more funding for LIHEAP continues as supporters of the federal energy assistance program look for legislative vehicles on which to attach amendments to add money to the program.

The Republican leadership in the House of Representatives Thursday delayed a vote on a budget reconciliation bill that included \$ 1 billion in additional funding for LIHEAP. Details are at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/10/AR2005111001333.html>. The vote on that bill has now been rescheduled for next week.

Meanwhile, the CEOs of the nation's largest oil companies were called before a joint Senate committee Wednesday to testify about skyrocketing energy prices and the enormous profits made by the companies. The oil company executives tried to explain that high gasoline, natural gas and home heating oil prices were the result of the disruption caused by hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and high market prices.

When asked by the Senators if the companies would consider using some of their profits to help fund LIHEAP, the executives said they could not support that concept because the idea of the private sector funding a federal program would set a dangerous precedent.

NFFN will continue to follow the action on Capitol Hill and will report to you as the situation develops.

Fuel Fund Actions

- The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., awarded a \$450,000 grant to be given over three years to the Fuel Fund of Maryland, Inc. to help vulnerable Marylanders pay their energy bills.

Mary Ellen Vanni, Executive Director of the Fuel Fund said "The Fuel Fund is extraordinarily grateful to the Weinberg Foundation for this outstanding gift to vulnerable people in Maryland. Already the Fuel Fund has spent \$100,000 more

on people needing help with their energy bills than the same time last year—and the winter has barely begun. This is an historic time: many more families are not only in need, but the depth of their need is much greater.”

- New Jersey SHARES in partnership with Verizon New Jersey to set up a service center to help eligible residents take part in Verizon’s Communications Lifeline Program, provides a credit toward the monthly telephone bill and Link Up America, which provides a 50% discount on telephone connection charges.

The Center will conduct outreach efforts; identify qualified residents not currently enrolled in the programs and answer questions about the programs

Utility Actions

- Aquila, a natural gas utility providing service in Iowa and six other states, announced that it was matching a \$40,000 anonymous donation to the Aquila Cares program. The \$80,000 will be provided to Operation: New View community action agency specifically to assist Dubuque area residents.

The utility this year increased its contribution to the Aquila Cares program from \$100,000 to \$500,000 across its service area. Aquila matches customer and employee contributions to Aquila Cares dollar for dollar up to \$250,000. The company also made a separate donation of \$250,000 to the program.

- Constellation Energy and Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE) announced that it was making \$20 million available over the next few years to various charities and programs, including the Fuel Fund of Maryland and BGE's Community Assistance Fund, which is administered through the Baltimore Community Foundation. As part of this assistance, BGE will make a special \$2 million direct cash contribution to the Fuel Fund of Maryland for customer assistance.

In addition, BGE intends to earmark \$6 million in spending over a three- year period for energy conservation programs to promote the use of energy efficient products and other cost-effective ways of saving energy. BGE will also increase the level of matching credits to the Fuel Fund from \$1 million to \$2 million during the upcoming year.

- Consumers Energy in Grand Rapids, MI is increasing its contribution to the PeopleCare program by \$1 million increasing funding for the Salvation Army run program to \$2.5 million. The utility said customers and employees have donated about \$600,000 to the program so far this year matching the 2004 total contributions to the program.

- Atlanta Gas Light distributed a total of \$315,000 in grants to four Georgia social service organizations. The funds are intended to provide heating bill assistance to low-income and elderly residents of the state.

H.E.A.T. Inc., received \$150,000 for energy assistance; Resource Service Ministries received \$75,000 for its furnace replacement and refurbishing program; the Sullivan Center, \$50,000 for energy assistance; and United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, \$40,000 for the agency's 211 referral program.

- Pacific Gas and Electric has proposed granting a 20 percent rebate on natural gas charges to customers who reduce their gas usage by 10 percent or more for three months compared to the same months last winter. According to the plan, which must be approved by the California Public Utilities Commission, customers who cut cumulative energy usage by 10 percent from January 1, 2006 to March 31, 2006 would earn a 20 percent rebate gas charges for those months.

PG&E has also proposed establishing a Winter Cost Deferral program that would help customers lower their bills from December to February by deferring a portion of the bill until the spring and summer, when gas bills are usually less. The customer would be allowed to put off payment of about nine percent of the monthly bill during the winter months and to make up the payments during the rest of the year.

- PPL Gas Utilities in Pennsylvania announced that it is tripling its donation to Operation Share making the utility's contribution to the program \$150,000. PPL Gas is also increasing enrollment in its Customer Assistance program by 10 percent and is extending its shut-off protection to customers who earn less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

In addition, PPL Electric Utilities is increasing by 40 percent its contribution to the utility's Operation Share program. The company will donate \$700,000 to the program this winter.

- TXU Energy has launched its Peace of Mind Program that includes a \$25 million contribution to a new low-income discount program for customers, who previously qualified for the low-income customer program that was discontinued by the Texas legislature. The new program will allow eligible customers to obtain a 10 percent discount on their 2006 utility bills.

Other components of the Peace of Mind Program include allowing residential customers in TXU Energy's North Texas territory to freeze their price for all of 2006 beginning Jan 1, with no cancellation fee; a \$2.5 million donation to support a customer education program by the Public Utility Commission; and a price freeze for the entire first quarter of 2006 for all residential and small business customers in the North Texas territory.

State Government Actions

- Maryland Gov. Robert Ehrlich announced that the state would provide nearly \$13 million in additional heating assistance funds and would ease eligibility requirements to make programs available to an estimated 60,000 additional households.

The governor said the state's Project Heat Up plan would expand eligibility to residents who make up to 175 percent of the federal poverty level, a 16.6 percent increase over the current 150 percent limit.

Most of the \$13 million in additional funding would be used to subsidize heating bills for the newly eligible applicants and the rest, about \$400,000, would go to the state's weatherization program.

- The District of Columbia Office of People's Counsel held a one day Energy Summit on November 8. Some 35 stakeholders identified measures that they were already taking to address the impending heating season. Stakeholders also compiled a list of possible initiatives and formed groups to initiate new efforts.
- Pennsylvania Gov. Edward Rendell, as part of his Stay Warm PA program, brought together more than 180 organizations and individuals involved in energy assistance for a summit to discuss the best ways to help the state's most vulnerable residents this winter.

The summit, which was held at seven locations across the state and connected through a videoconference network, was designed to allow people involved at all levels of energy assistance to voice their opinions and discuss ways to make the programs more efficient.

Those participating in the summit agreed that some of the most important goals for this winter are designating a single point of contact, with a toll-free number, where people can get information on available energy assistance; the creation of a volunteer network for neighbors to keep an eye on neighbors who might be reluctant to seek help, and increased state and federal funding.