

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**KENNEDY: LIHEAP FUNDS FALL SHORT FOR AMERICA'S FAMILIES  
*AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY***

Today's Senate action adding \$1 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program for this winter will hopefully become a step in the right direction, but much of it seems to be smoke and mirrors. Once again, we've failed to provide enough actual assistance to millions of struggling families around the country, many of whom are elderly or disabled.

When we left for the holiday recess last December, we felt we had a commitment from the Senate Majority Leader to bring up a bill to add \$2 billion for LIHEAP. But today's bill offers only half that amount, and it obtains that amount by taking it from the LIHEAP funds allocated for next winter under the Budget Reconciliation Bill. Shamefully, the budget released yesterday by President Bush for next winter requests no increase at all in LIHEAP from this year's level of \$2.18 billion, which is far less than the \$5.1 billion authorized by Congress for the current year. As a result, only \$1.8 billion will be available for next winter, so this same battle will have to be fought all over again later this year. Robbing 2007 funds to pay 2006 home heating costs makes no sense. Republicans must think global warming will reduce the need for LIHEAP next winter; otherwise their callous neglect of this basic need to help millions of families is immoral and inexplicable.

Worst of all, under today's bill, only \$250 million of the \$1 billion in new funds for this winter must be released immediately through the LIHEAP formula grants to states. The other \$750 million is in the form of emergency funds, which can be released or withheld at President Bush's discretion. That means the states may actually obtain far less, or none at all, of that amount. Families need this assistance urgently, and they will be watching George Bush closely to see how much he cares.

In fact, countless citizens in communities throughout America live year-round with the constant threat of power shut-offs because they can't pay their energy bills, and they have no confidence that either Congress or this President are on their side.

According to a report by the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, since the winter of 2001-2002, the average cost of heating oil soared from \$627 to \$1474, natural gas from \$465 to \$1000 and propane from \$736 to \$1286. Yet, the Republican Congress and the Administration continue to ignore the fact that millions of Americans can't afford these steep increases.

Democrats have pressed for months to increase funds for LIHEAP to the authorized level of \$5.1 billion. We've urged the Republican leadership and the President to act, but the Republican majority has blocked our efforts at every turn, and families are paying a steep price for that neglect. The average LIHEAP grant has decreased by almost 10 percent since 2002, and is now only \$288.

In Massachusetts, the state government has provided \$20 million in additional funds for LIHEAP this year. Low-income families are more fortunate in our state than in most other states on this issue, but there is still great need. Even the poorest households with the highest bills will get no more than \$840- less than half what is needed to get through the winter.

As Self Help, a community action program in Avon, Massachusetts has said, "Many of our clients have exhausted their benefits, and virtually all of our clients that heat with oil will exhaust their benefit before the end of January...and the worst of the winter is still to come. The bottom line is that we need some kind of relief, as quickly as possible."

ABCD, a community action agency in Boston, reports that as of January 17th, the number of applicants applying for fuel assistance for the first time has increased by 26 percent. Its clients are currently exhausting all of their fuel assistance benefits. Even a benefit of \$765 buys only one tank of oil at today's price of \$2.40 per gallon, when at least two or three tankfuls are needed to get through the winter, and no other source of funding is available.

These aren't just numbers. They represent real people facing real hardships. An elderly couple lives in a modest home on the outskirts of Haverhill and both receive social security benefits. Their home is heated with oil and they use an old woodstove in the basement to supplement their steam boiler. Their \$525 LIHEAP grant covered one delivery of 256 gallons of oil in late November. Attempting to cut wood for the woodstove, the husband fell from a ladder and was injured. If LIHEAP had been funded fairly, this injury could have been prevented.

It's wrong to let people like this suffer. It's wrong that we have a President and a Congress who continue to say "Let them eat cake."

I ask unanimous consent that a table on LIHEAP authorizations and appropriations may be printed at this point in the Record.