

THE
NEW ENGLAND
COUNCIL

November 8, 2007

Dear Member of Congress:

The Northeast is on the doorstep of another winter. As the amount of daylight continues to shrink, so will temperatures, and snow will follow close behind. On behalf of the New England Council I urge you to seize any opportunity to provide federal relief to New England households that will struggle with the high cost of heating their homes this winter. A reasonably warm place to live is a matter of survival in a harsh New England winter, and as the debate over next year's budget for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) continues to unfold (along with the entire appropriations process), please take advantage of any available means to provide for those who need assistance.

As you know well, the price of a barrel of crude oil (a significant factor in home heating oil costs) has nearly hit triple digits, and record energy prices once again will force many families to face the horrific choice of purchasing essentials like food and medicine, or turning on their heat. These all-too frequent increases in crude oil prices also take time to translate into the "true" cost of heating oil, so the worst financial burden for many individuals and families may still lie ahead. Combine this with familiar spikes in gasoline prices (and worse gas mileage with car heaters in overdrive), and the winter season can present a financial burden that proves too much for many New Englanders.

One U.S. Department of Energy figure in particular underscores just how critical LIHEAP funding is to our communities: 6.3 million homes in the Northeast rely on heating oil to heat their homes – a staggering majority of the 8.1 million oil-burning households in our country. Therefore, it is no surprise that New England is disproportionately affected by high energy prices and in disproportionate need of assistance.

The \$2.41 billion in federal LIHEAP funding for Fiscal Year 2008 (a \$250 million increase over FY07) included in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Conference Report will provide relief for many New England families. However, unpredictable market factors (like future hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, political instability overseas, or extreme cold snaps) may continue to drive energy prices or demand for assistance higher. It is critical as the appropriations process draws to a close that members of the New England delegation do all they can to secure additional funding so that states can provide meaningful relief to as many families as possible.

Very Truly Yours,

Jim Brett
President & CEO

