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For Immediate release - July 23, 2008

**Governor Patrick, Senate President Murray, Speaker Dimasi
Establish Task Force on Winter Energy Costs****Group will report within 60 days with recommendations for actions to prepare
citizens for the coming heating season**

BOSTON - Wednesday, July 23, 2008 - As energy prices continue to soar, Governor Deval Patrick today announced he will partner with House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi and Senate President Therese Murray to launch a joint task force to address winter energy costs. The nine-member body, which will consist of five Cabinet secretaries and four legislators, will report within 60 days with an action plan to help citizens cope with the high cost of energy expected this winter.

"People are feeling anxious about skyrocketing energy prices, and I share their concern - the pinch will become tighter when the temperature drops and furnaces turn on," said Governor Deval Patrick. "To avoid a crisis this winter, we need to do everything we can do now to help our citizens protect themselves against rising costs."

"People are already struggling to keep up with the rising costs of energy and the resulting increase in food prices," Senate President Therese Murray said. "Once the cold weather hits, it could become a critical situation for many families, which is why we need to think ahead and be prepared. This task force will be able to make recommendations that will help citizens reduce their cost burden and get through the winter months."

"This task force will look at creative solutions to help Massachusetts residents address the high winter heating and transportation costs that we all face," said House Speaker Salvatore F. DiMasi. "The work of the task force coupled with new comprehensive alternative energy legislation will set in motion a long-term plan for residents to take advantage of greater energy efficiencies."

As a result of rapidly rising prices for fossil fuels, home heating costs are skyrocketing, and are likely to hit Massachusetts households hard this winter. The price of home heating oil in New England has jumped 87 percent since the winter of 2005-2006. With home heating oil now \$4.71 a gallon in Massachusetts, it will take more than \$3,750 to heat an average Massachusetts household with oil next winter, up from \$1,800 just two winters ago. Heating costs are also likely to rise sharply for those who depend on natural gas and other fuels.

These increased heating costs come at a time when gasoline prices have also hit record levels - \$4.07 a gallon for regular in the most recent statewide survey by the Department of Energy Resources. Electricity prices are expected to rise as well, as a result of rising natural gas prices.

At the same time, federal fuel assistance dollars for eligible families have decreased dramatically. Following a recent meeting of the New England Governors Conference hosted by Governor Patrick, all six New England governors signed a letter calling on the federal government to provide \$1 billion in Low Income Heating Assistance Program funds for the New England region, up from \$267 million last year.

The task force will examine ways to use existing resources to help citizens as they contend with high energy costs this coming winter. This will include a review of emergency service programs, as well as available programs to reduce home energy use through weatherization and efficiency improvements. Other areas of energy cost savings could include incentives for carpooling and use of public transportation. The task force will also explore ways to mobilize community, volunteer, and philanthropic resources to address service needs.

The landmark energy legislation signed by Governor Patrick earlier this month creates new incentives for consumers to save money on electricity bills by investing in energy efficiency. The Green Communities Act also makes it more advantageous for homeowners and businesses to invest in green power options like solar and wind.

"The energy bill gives us new tools to make our electricity cheaper and cleaner, but the high cost of heating this winter will require

additional action by all of us," said Secretary of Energy and Environment Ian Bowles.

Serving on the joint task force from the Patrick Administration will be Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles (chair), Secretary of Administration and Finance Leslie Kirwan, Secretary of Health and Human Services JudyAnn Bigby, Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Dan O'Connell, and Secretary of Transportation and Public Works Bernard Cohen. The House Speaker, Senate President, and the House and Senate Minority Leaders will each appoint one legislative member of the task force.