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GOVERNORTIMOTHY P. MURRAY  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR**Media Contact**Kyle Sullivan  
Becky Deusser  
Kim Haberlin  
617-725-4025

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**Task Force Calls for Expanded Fuel Assistance Eligibility, Dramatic Increase in Efficiency Efforts to Control Heating Costs****Patrick, Murray, DiMasi say more Mass. residents can get help paying bills and reducing energy costs thanks to federal, state funds**

BOSTON - Thursday, October 30, 2008 - Governor Deval Patrick, Senate President Therese Murray, and House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi today endorsed the Winter Energy Costs Task Force report, including recommendations to expand eligibility for federal fuel assistance to help an additional 55,000 Massachusetts families heat their homes this winter. The Task Force, appointed jointly by the Governor and legislative leaders in July, also calls for increased investments in energy efficiency and weatherization to save money on fuel costs now and in the future.

These measures are possible due to Governor Patrick's and legislative leaders' successful work with the Massachusetts Congressional delegation to obtain additional federal funding for low-income fuel aid. Massachusetts' federal heating assistance allocation nearly doubled from \$114 million to \$212 million this winter, as did funding for low-income weatherization, to \$13 million this year. New resources for energy efficiency investments have also been made available from the auction of emissions allowances through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

"In these difficult times, we need to help the neediest people pay their heating bills, and help everyone stretch their energy dollars further," said Governor Patrick. "Thanks to the federal funds we have received and the auction proceeds we are getting from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, we will be able to do that this winter."

"Long before anyone imagined the current market crisis, we knew the cost of fuel and heating this winter would pose a great challenge to families across the Commonwealth," said Senate President Murray. "That's why we took proactive steps in July, when the weather was still warm, to establish this task force and be prepared. The recommendations we now have will support new energy efficiency measures and reduce the cost burden for more families to help them get through the cold months ahead."

"In these difficult times, the high cost of home heating creates yet another burden for those with low and moderate incomes and, for some, the needs may soon be dangerous," said Speaker DiMasi. "We established this task force so we could act ahead of the crisis and these recommendations will carry forward the bold work begun with the Green Communities law and so much more in our last session. I am confident we will together be able to help our neighbors in need get through this winter safe and warm."

The Winter Energy Costs Task Force, which consists of five Patrick Administration Cabinet secretaries and four members of the Legislature, was formed July 23, shortly after the price of home heating oil reached a record \$4.71 a gallon, a 45 percent jump from the average price for last winter. Anticipating a potential crisis, the Task Force held five public hearings across the state in August and September to gather input on ways that the Commonwealth could prepare its citizens for high heating fuel costs this winter. Testimony was taken from more than 100 state legislators, local officials, community action agency directors, utility executives, nonprofit and business leaders, fire chiefs, senior and disability advocates, and concerned citizens in Springfield, Fall River, Haverhill, Worcester, and Boston.

The primary recommendations of the Winter Energy Costs Task Force are as follows:

**FUEL ASSISTANCE**

- Expand eligibility for fuel assistance from \$42,400 to \$53,600 for a family of four, which would help an additional 55,000 families in Massachusetts obtain fuel assistance this winter. These households would receive a benefit of \$445, enough for one month's worth of heat for oil-heated customers.
- Expand private philanthropy for families in need of help with heating bills that do not qualify for government support by

encouraging corporate and foundation leaders to contribute to and raise funds for charities such as the Salvation Army's Good Neighbor Energy Fund.

#### ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND CONSERVATION

- Double efficiency investments to save consumers money on energy bills through greatly expanded electric and natural gas utilities' energy efficiency programs, known as MassSave, under plans for 2009 to be approved by the Department of Public Utilities and paid for in part by the proceeds of emissions allowance auctions through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). This would follow the \$5.9 million (19 percent) expansion of efficiency programs approved for the fourth quarter of 2008; \$3 million of the \$13.3 million generated by the first RGGI allowance auction has been set aside to pay for this expansion, and a second auction is scheduled for December 17.
- Convene, under the auspices of the Department of Energy Resources, academic, technical, and industry experts to supplement planning by the utilities to identify new mechanisms for achieving much higher levels of energy efficiency than provided by traditional programs and measures.
- Replace antiquated heating systems for low-income households, an efficiency measure that will save energy and stretch fuel assistance dollars further, with \$4 million of the proceeds from the first two RGGI auctions.

#### EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

- Make Mass 2-1-1, a service coordinated by United Way, the primary information and referral hotline to provide advice on heating options, assistance that is available, and what to do in a heating emergency.
- Launch a public awareness campaign promoting energy efficiency and disseminating heating emergency information consisting of high-quality, high-impact advertisements and public service announcements produced by the state's top advertising firms, working in collaboration with state agencies, and broadcast prominently and strategically with the cooperation of television and radio stations across the Commonwealth, in addition to transit and outdoor advertisements. This campaign would be paid for by \$500,000 of RGGI auction proceeds.

"Fuel prices have come down, but with the economy in turmoil, heating costs will continue to be a challenge," said Ian Bowles, Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and chair of the Winter Energy Costs Task Force. "In the Green Communities Act, the Legislature directed us to dramatically expand energy efficiency, putting it to work for consumers, saving money and energy, and we intend to do that."

Prices of heating fuels have fallen recently, with oil down to \$3.14 a gallon last week - the result of a global financial crisis and economic slowdown that is expected to weaken demand for petroleum. This price is still 10 percent higher than a year ago, and just below last winter's average price. The Winter Energy Costs Task Force calls the summertime energy-price scare a "wake-up call" that state officials, civic leaders, and citizens cannot ignore. "There is no time like the present to prepare for, and arm all of our citizens against, the inevitable return of higher energy prices in the future," says the Task Force report.

On October 1, President Bush approved federal fuel assistance funding of \$5.1 billion nationwide, a doubling of last year's appropriation. Under the federal allocation formula for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), that translates into \$212 million for Massachusetts, up from \$114 million, which the state supplemented with \$15 million of its own funds. Combined with federal monies left over from last year and recently released, plus \$10 million of state funds appropriated earlier this year, \$233.5 million in fuel assistance funding will allow for an increase in average benefits from \$738 to \$1,022, enough to provide 10 weeks of heat based on the current price of home heating oil. In 2007, 141,000 households received LIHEAP funding. That number will rise to roughly 200,000 this year.

The full report of the Winter Energy Costs Task Force is available at [www.mass.gov/governor/winterenergy](http://www.mass.gov/governor/winterenergy). For additional information about home heating and energy, please visit [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov). The Patrick Administration has assembled helpful information about heating assistance for individuals and towns, efficiency programs and other initiatives that will assist families prepare for the winter heating season.

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