

Dec 5 2005 - Slaughter Urges Increase in LIHEAP Funding in Face of Rising Heating Costs

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Current Appropriations Level Declared to be "Perilously Inadequate"

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today signed on to a letter urging the House Appropriations Committee to increase its 2006 funding of LIHEAP to the highest level authorized by Congress. The letter, signed by over 90 Members of Congress, was sent to Reps. Ralph Regula and David Obey, Chairman and Ranking Member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, respectively.

"There are working families throughout our region and the country who will be forced to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table. This shouldn't happen in America," Rep. Slaughter said. "In the wake of an unprecedented natural disaster, and in the midst of high energy prices and an ongoing conflict abroad, the last thing working Americans need is to worry about how they are going to heat their homes this winter," she added.

The letter stated in part that, "While we [the signatories] understand the budgetary constraints governing Conference negotiations, we encourage you to do whatever you can to fund this program at the highest level possible," adding that, "Funding LIHEAP at or below last year's level...will prove perilously inadequate."

BACKGROUND

The Energy Information Administration has estimated that this winter, the average gas-heated household will spend \$306 more for fuel than it did last winter, an increase of 41 percent. This will place a significant burden on low-income individuals whose disposable incomes are already stretched thin.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is designed to assist such citizens to meet their heating needs. However, the current level of 2006 funding for LIHEAP being discussed by the House Appropriations Committee does not reflect increased costs projected to impact families this winter.

Congress' Energy Policy Act authorized LIHEAP funding of up to \$5.1 billion per year. At the present time, proposed funding stands at around \$2 billion.