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Senator Hillary Clinton Urges Adding \$1 Billion in Emergency Funding for LIHEAP

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Clinton Urges Action to Assist Low-Income Households in Coming Winter Months as Energy Prices Reach Record Highs

December 4, 2007 -- Washington, DC - Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton announced that she has joined a bipartisan coalition of Senators in calling on the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Related Appropriations Subcommittee to include an additional \$1 billion in emergency funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

In a letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member, the lawmakers urged the subcommittee to provide assistance to households this winter that are facing hardships due to rapidly escalating energy costs by increasing emergency funding for the LIHEAP program by \$1 billion for a total of \$3.412 billion for FY 2008. In addition, Senator Clinton today cosponsored the Keep Americans Warm Act of 2007, a bill that would provide for the critical \$1 billion in emergency funding.

"With oil prices hovering near record levels and energy prices reaching all time highs, the emergency funding for LIHEAP would provide critical relief for New Yorker's and other Americans who cannot afford to keep their families warm this winter," Senator Clinton said. "Low-income households disproportionately endure the burden of rising energy costs, and we must act now to supply them with the appropriate assistance so that no one has to suffer through the frigid winter temperatures without heat."

Between FY2003 and FY2007 the number of households receiving LIHEAP assistance increased by 26 percent from 4.6 million to about 5.8 million or about 15.6 percent of the eligible population. During this same period, the federal appropriation increased by only 10 percent with the resulting average grant declining from \$349 to \$305, significantly

decreasing the program's purchasing power. Unfortunately, with oil prices nearing \$100 per barrel, energy prices are not decreasing proportionally. In other words, while the cost of heating one's home continues to rise; federal heating assistance will be significantly lower. This is why it is essential that the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Related Appropriations Subcommittee include an additional \$1 billion in emergency funding for LIHEAP.

Senator Clinton has worked tirelessly to increase LIHEAP funding to make sure low income New Yorkers are able to heat their homes in the midst of record energy costs. As early as this November, Senator Clinton called on President Bush to make available the remaining \$20 million in the LIHEAP contingency fund (See- <http://clinton.senate.gov/news/statements/details.cfm?id=287872&&>), and joined several of her senate colleagues in calling on the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to support a funding level of \$5.1 billion for LIHEAP for the FY 2009 (See - <http://clinton.senate.gov/news/statements/details.cfm?id=287040&&>).

A copy of the letter to Senators Harkin and Specter is attached –

December 3, 2007

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
The Honorable Arlen Specter, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
and Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

We are writing to request that you include an additional \$1 billion in emergency funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in fiscal year 2008 to provide for a total of \$3.412 billion. We recognize the difficult budget constraints that the Subcommittee faces and appreciate your support for additional funding for the LIHEAP program in FY2008 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Related Appropriations Conference Report that was vetoed.

With the price of oil hovering near \$100 per barrel, and the Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimating that households can expect to pay between 10 to 26 percent more for heating fuels than during the 2007-2008 winter, states need additional funding immediately to reduce the energy burden of families, individuals with disabilities, and senior citizens and ensure their health and safety this winter.

Between FY2003 and FY2007 the number of households receiving LIHEAP assistance increased by 26 percent from 4.6 million to about 5.8 million or about 15.6 percent of the eligible population. During this same period, the federal appropriation increased by only 10 percent with the resulting average grant declining from \$349 to \$305. Unfortunately, energy prices are not decreasing proportionally, but instead continue to rise. As a result, there has been a significant decrease in the program's purchasing power. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, states are planning to reduce the number of households served by about 15 percent in the absence of additional federal and supplemental state funding. The result would be a decline in the number of households served from about 5.8 million in FY2007 to 4.9 million. For these reasons, we believe an additional \$1 billion in emergency funding is warranted.

LIHEAP is vital to protecting the public health and safety of low-income families. According to the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) out of Boston Medical Center, babies and toddlers who live in energy insecure households are more likely to suffer poor health, require hospitalization, manifest developmental problems, and lack adequate food. C-SNAP found that when families do not have access to sufficient energy, they may resort to unsafe heating methods and do not have the proper means to refrigerate or prepare food for their children. In addition, without a sufficient LIHEAP benefit, seniors living on fixed incomes often have to decide between buying life-saving prescriptions and paying utility bills. For individuals and households that may have to face these difficult choices, LIHEAP makes a real difference in their ability to cope with adverse circumstances.

Moreover, the program helps low-income homeowners weatherize their homes to save energy and lower their energy burden. Weatherization, on average, reduces heating bills by 31 percent and overall energy bills by \$200 to \$250 per year.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you to increase funding for the LIHEAP program to ensure that low-income seniors, individuals with disabilities, and families have the resources that they need to stay warm this winter.

Source: Senator Hillary Clinton

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