



Presidential Climate Action Project

Climate Action Brief

Weatherization: An Economic Stimulus That Wouldn't Quit

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The New York Times reports that millions of Americans are behind on their electric and gas bills and a record number of families face energy shut-offs over the next two months.ⁱ

Meantime, President Bush's 2009 budget plan would zero out one of the federal programs most vital to families facing energy emergencies and would cut another.

The program facing elimination is the Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program, which installs insulation, weather stripping and other efficiency improvements in the homes of low-income families. At the same time, the Administration has proposed a 22 percent cut in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which provides emergency fuel assistance to families who are facing cutoffs because they are not able to pay their energy bills.ⁱⁱ

With energy and food prices rising, and with the economy uncertain, cutting the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is untimely. Cutting the Weatherization Assistance Program is downright short-sighted. Why?

- The weatherization program reduces the danger that families will face future energy emergencies.
- The program hires local crews to do the work, creating green jobs – about 45 jobs for every \$1 million invested in the program.
- Oil and gas prices are likely to continue trending upward. International competition for these finite resources is increasing. When Congress puts a price on carbon – which it is expected to do as part of cap-and-trade legislation – the price of fossil fuels will rise more. Low-income families spend a disproportionate share of their income on energy and will be least able to cope with increasing prices.
- Unlike the rebate checks that taxpayers are about to receive in hopes of stimulating the economy, energy efficiency measures like those installed by the Weatherization Assistance Program provide continuing stimulus. The average first-year savings is \$413 for families served by the program, and savings continue year after year. The estimated

savings over the lifetime of the weatherization measures is more than \$3,200 per household, according to the National Association for State Community Services Programs.ⁱⁱⁱ

- By reducing energy waste in some of the nation's leakiest buildings, the Weatherization Assistance Program helps cut America's contribution to the greenhouse gas emissions responsible for global warming.
- Weatherizing the homes of low-income families will reduce the number of heat-related illnesses and deaths in the U.S. Heat waves, classified as the "largest natural-caused killer in the world," increased 88 percent in the U.S. from 1949 to 1995.^{iv} A study by the University of Maryland predicts that heat-related deaths will more than double in the United States within 50 years.^v

President Bush promised a different future for these programs when he ran for the presidency in 2000. His platform^{vi} included these proposals:

- Expand the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program by \$1 billion over 10 years by directing a portion of oil and gas royalty payments to the program.
- Increase funding for the Weatherization Program and State Energy Program by \$1.4 billion over 10 years.

As part of a comprehensive federal approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and helping the nation adapt to climate change and climate policy, the Presidential Climate Action Project has recommended that the appropriation for the Weatherization Assistance Program be increased to \$1.4 billion annually, with 2 percent of that amount allocated to pilot projects involving materials, equipment and technologies not currently covered in the program.

This brief was prepared by the nonpartisan Presidential Climate Action Project at the University of Colorado Denver. PCAP, which is developing a 100-day climate action plan for the next President of the United States, issues briefs from time to time for the use of the presidential candidates as they consider policies to deal with climate change. Details are available at www.climateactionproject.com.

ⁱ See "Cutoffs and Pleas for Aid Rise with Heat Costs," Erick Eckholm, New York Times, April 25, 2008 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/25/us/25heating.html?th&emc=th>

ⁱⁱ These cuts and other proposed energy reductions in the President's 2009 budget are summarized by the Center for American Progress at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/02/energy_budget.html

ⁱⁱⁱ See <http://wxprogram.blogspot.com/>

^{iv} "Heat Waves and Climate Change Fact Sheet," Center for Health and the Global Environment of Harvard Medical School, 2006. See <http://chge.med.harvard.edu/publications/bulletin/documents/heatfact06.pdf>.

^v "Global Warming to Increase Heat-Related Deaths in Baltimore," news release, Environment Maryland, Sept. 5, 2007. See www.environmentmaryland.org/newsroom/global-warming/global-warming-campaign-news/global-warming-to-increase-heat-related-deaths-in-baltimore

^{vi} <http://www.4president.org/issues/bush2000/bush2000energy.htm>