

New Energy Efficiency Incentives Abound

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As the weather gets colder, heating costs are rising. Sen. Smith writes about the many state and federal programs that are in place to help Wisconsin residents with heating bills and energy efficiency improvements.

BRUNSWICK, WI - This time of the year leaves most of us dreading to see our heating bills, but this year we have new options to afford our bills and better incentives to make home improvements that will lower our bills going forward.

Last month the U.S. Energy Information Administration released an important warning about higher than expected energy costs this winter. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) forecasts temperatures this winter to be colder than last winter, which will contribute to heating fuel consumption and demand.

In the Midwest, where well over half of households use natural gas to heat their home, costs are estimated to increase by 33%. For electricity, the increase in cost is somewhat less, but still significant, projected at around 10%. WEC Energy Group released an estimate that electric heating prices per household may go up an average of \$20 to \$30 a month.



Established by the federal government in 1991, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) annually helps many families afford the cost of heating their home throughout the winter. LIHEAP helped more people than it ever had during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, when compared to need, the program is incredibly underfunded. LIHEAP estimates the program is only able to help one out of every six eligible households, leaving many families to find support on their own.

President Biden recently announced an additional investment of \$4.5 billion through LIHEAP to help Americans with home heating costs. This comes about a month after Governor Tony Evers announced \$13.6 million in funding to Wisconsin's division of the program, WHEAP. This additional funding will absorb rising prices and rate hikes and help more families keep the heat on this winter.

As a member of the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, I have been serious about incorporating energy efficiency, reducing energy use and finding renewable solutions. Every decision we make for climate change today will save Wisconsin families money down the road. We've got to take a diversified approach to tackling climate change and think outside the box for ways we can maximize our energy use and resources.

This winter, consider taking steps to make your home more efficient. In addition to the Biden administration's LIHEAP funding, the U.S. Department of Energy announced they would allocate an additional \$9 billion in funding from the Inflation Reduction Act to support 1.6 million households nationwide to upgrade their homes and decrease energy bills.

Wisconsin's version of the energy efficiency assistance program is called the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). WAP can help low-income property owners improve energy efficiency and cut down on heating costs. Improvements such as improving insulation, sealing air leaks, installing energy-saving technology devices and repairing or replacing inefficient appliances can dramatically lower energy costs.



Progressive thinking is the key to solving the world's most complex problems. It is the ability to see things from a new perspective, to challenge the status quo, and to find innovative solutions. In the world of energy efficiency, progressive thinking is essential for developing new technologies, improving existing ones, and creating a sustainable future for all.