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## CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS MISREPRESENT WHY ENERGY ASSISTANCE FUNDS WERE STRIPPED IN SENATE

### Hastert, Santorum, Gregg, Grassley Make Incorrect Statements

by Robert Greenstein

A number of Congressional leaders yesterday incorrectly sought to portray a decision Wednesday to strip \$2 billion in heating assistance funds from the defense appropriations bill as being necessitated by the Senate rejection of oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The facts are clear, however, that the removal of the Arctic drilling provision had no connection (other than a political one) to the \$2 billion in funding for the Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) this winter and that the decision to remove the energy assistance funds, made by the Republican Congressional Leadership, was not necessitated by the dropping of the ANWR provision.

The defense appropriations bill contained *two* provisions related to LIHEAP funding. One would have provided \$2 billion in additional funding for LIHEAP this winter. The second provision would, starting in 2008, have dedicated to LIHEAP a small percentage of federal receipts from the Arctic drilling. The second LIHEAP provision *was* tied to the oil drilling. The first provision *was not*. The Congressional Leadership elected to strip out *both* of the LIHEAP provisions when the ANWR provision was removed from the bill, a step that was unnecessary with regard to the \$2 billion in funding for this winter. (For a further discussion of this matter, see the CBPP analysis "Senate Cuts LIHEAP Funding," December 22, 2005.<sup>1</sup>)

Several Republican leaders yesterday made statements that incorrectly claimed the removal of the ANWR provision necessitated the removal of the \$2 billion in LIHEAP funds. The *Harrisburg Patriot-News* reported that a spokesman for Senator Rick Santorum (R-Pa), the chair of the Senate Republican Conference, told the newspaper that "Democrats stripped out the \$2 billion in LIHEAP money because it would have been funded by revenues from oil drilling in ANWR."<sup>2</sup> The claim that the \$2 billion in funding for this winter would have been financed by revenues from oil drilling is false.

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<sup>1</sup> James Horney, "Senate Cuts LIHEAP Funding: Despite Claims, There Is No Legitimate Connection Between ANWR and LIHEAP," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, December 22, 2005, available at <http://www.cbpp.org/12-22-05bud.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> David DeKok, "Heating-aid funds take hit," *The Patriot-News*, December 23, 2005.

Similarly, Senator Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, was quoted in the *Des Moines Register* as saying that when the drilling provision was defeated, it took away the means to pay for the increase in utility assistance.<sup>3</sup> And Senator Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, was quoted in the *Boston Globe* as saying that the only way Congress could have found extra money for the heating assistance program was through a new revenue source such as selling leases to the drilling rights in the Arctic refuge.<sup>4</sup> These statements are equally misinformed.

### **Confusion on LIHEAP Funding Extends to Budget Reconciliation Bill**

A final misstatement came yesterday from a spokesman for House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.). The spokesman attacked Senate Democrats for delaying passage of a separate piece of legislation — the budget reconciliation bill that would cut Medicaid, student loans, child support enforcement, and other programs — by securing the removal on procedural grounds of a few small provisions from the bill and thus necessitating another vote on the bill in the House. The Hastert spokesman, Ron Bonjean, said this action would delay the provision of money to help low-income families pay their heating bills.<sup>5</sup> This statement, as well, has no basis in fact. The only money for heating assistance contained in the budget reconciliation bill is funding for 2007. The bill is drafted so that none of those funds could be distributed this winter.

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Norman, “\$2 billion heat aid addition removed from bill,” *Des Moines Register*, December 23, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Milligan and Rick Klein, Heating aid slashed; N.E. faces burden,” *Boston Globe*, December 23, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Maura Reynolds and Joel Havemann, “Patriot Act Extension Is Cut From 6 Months to 5 Weeks,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 2005.