

Rebates Offer No Real Help on Energy Costs

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New Mexicans can expect to face unprecedented energy costs this winter, costs which are unlikely to come down any time soon. For many, the rise in energy costs has outstripped the growth in income, resulting in home energy bills that are simply out of reach.

Gov. Bill Richardson recently proposed that the Legislature take up a \$200 million Cash Assistance Relief Effort (CARE) stimulus package during the special session convening today.

Unfortunately, as currently conceived, only 2 percent of this surplus money, or \$4 million, would be spent on energy efficiency, a long-term solution for New Mexico's ratepayers. An additional \$4 million would be spent on the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP. None of it would be spent to promote clean, renewable energy, which would lessen our dependence on increasingly expensive, risky and dirty energy sources like oil, gas and coal.

An energy affordability gap largely untouched by current policies, practices, and funding measures deserves more attention. Given energy pricing trends and statewide poverty levels, the gap will only continue to worsen, potentially impacting the health and safety of hundreds of thousands of New Mexicans.

Investments in energy-efficient homes, appliances and vehicles pay back over time, permanently lessening our dependence on high-cost energy sources, saving people money on their bills and at the gas station, and helping to reduce emissions that are contributing to global warming.

On average, weatheriza-

tion reduces heating bills by 32 percent and overall utility costs by \$358 per year at current prices. Renewable energy creates thousands of high-quality new jobs (twice as many as fossil fuel energy production), stimulates billions of dollars in economic investment, and keeps our money in the local economy.

As proposed, Richardson's CARE package would pay rebates directly to taxpayers, offer expanded tax holidays, and give more money to school districts to combat the high cost of gas.

Although this is an attractive political quick fix, without investing in long-term solutions to our rising energy prices, these rebates will go right into people's gas tanks, and New Mexicans will be right back where they started, facing unaffordable energy costs. There is nothing for New Mexico to gain by postponing a more bold, committed, and comprehensive approach to energy efficiency and affordability for all.

Energy efficiency, weatherization and conservation measures need more than short-term, token support. As an energy-producing state, we owe it to ratepayers to secure a safe, clean and affordable energy economy. We urge the governor and the Legislature to use the special session as an opportunity to create real, long-term solutions to New Mexico's rising energy prices. The outcome will reflect who we are, what we collectively care about, and what we want for New Mexico's children, families, and communities.

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