
Murphy: Fund Low-Income Energy Programs

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Chris Murphy offered an amendment to fully fund low-income home energy assistance programs, which the federal budget for 2011 cut by \$390 million.

Murphy offered his amendment to ensure a continual stream of funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) as part of legislation dealing with offshore drilling. His proposal, which was rejected by the Republican House majority, would have directed a portion of the royalties paid by oil companies on offshore drilling leases to LIHEAP.

"At a time when record-breaking gas prices are emptying people's pockets in Connecticut, we shouldn't be putting more money into oil companies' pockets, especially when the neediest are still struggling to make ends meet," said Murphy. "My amendment was based on a simple idea: if House Republicans are rushing to greenlight new offshore drilling, shouldn't they at least ensure that low income consumers are protected in the process?"

The legislation Murphy amended would force the federal government to offer new offshore drilling leases using safety data that pre-dates the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon disaster. Amongst other shortcomings, these deeply-flawed safety reviews assume that the largest likely oil spill in the Gulf would be 4,600 barrels: the Deepwater Horizon disaster led to more than 4 million barrels of oil spilling into the Gulf.

"The Administration was already planning to issue many of the drilling leases mandated by this legislation, but only after a thorough safety and environmental review. My amendment was introduced to send a clear message that the needs of low-income Americans who can't afford to heat their homes should always come before oil company profits," Murphy added.

In early March, Murphy wrote to the five largest oil companies operating in the U.S., requesting their assistance in meeting funding shortfalls for low income home heating programs in Connecticut like Operation Fuel. For the first time in its 34-year history, Operation Fuel, the statewide energy assistance non-profit, was forced to stop accepting applications for new aid at the end of February. None of the oil companies offered any assistance in response.

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