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GOVERNOR



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

The Vermont Fuel and Food Partnership

OVERVIEW

Governor Jim Douglas has launched **a new comprehensive and collaborative program to help Vermonters address increasing home heating, gasoline and food costs.**

The Governor announced the program Thursday, June 12, 2008 at Vermont Technical College—home of a new energy auditor training program. He was joined by members of a cabinet-level inter-agency task force and representatives of non-profit and other public organizations. **The cabinet-level task force is charged with collaborating with a wide range of public and private partners to marshal all available resources to help Vermonters address rising fuel, food and gasoline costs.** The task force is co-chaired by Lt. Governor Brian Dubie and Transportation Secretary Neale Lunderville

The program contains strategies to reduce expenses and protect the most vulnerable in three **(3) key areas: home heating fuel, transportation/gasoline and food.**

HOME HEATING FUEL STRATEGIES

“No Vermonter should be cold in his or her home this winter or any winter. Together, we can marshal the resources of all of our partners—public, private and non-profit—to be sure Vermonters have access to the information and resources they need to make homes more energy efficient, to weatherize them against the elements and to assist families that are struggling to pay heating bills.”

--Governor Jim Douglas
Thursday, June 12, 2008

➤ **ESTABLISH A SINGLE ENTRY POINT**

- The task force will collaborate with government, non-profit and private partners to develop a single point of entry for all available information and resources. The entry point will be a one-stop clearing house of information

and use various means to facilitate communication with Vermonters, including a **toll-free phone number**, a comprehensive website and public forums. **Vermont 211** will also serve as our partner to direct Vermonters to our helpline for additional services.

- A single point of entry efficiently and effectively connects Vermonters of all income levels with the information they need and the programs and services for which they qualify, including:
 - Weatherization & Efficiency Programs
 - Community Action Agencies (CAPs)
 - Efficiency Vermont
 - Private Contractors & Fuel Dealers
 - Conversion & Diversification Programs
 - CAPs
 - Private Contractors & Fuel Dealers
 - Direct Assistance
 - Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
 - Utility & Fuel Dealer Assistance Programs

ACTION ITEMS:

- Establish a new **Winter Heating Helpline** within the Public Service Department to serve as a clearinghouse for all government, non-profit, & private energy assistance programs. This helpline will be operational July 1.
- Launch a **companion website** with consolidated information
- Organize and conduct **8 regional energy workshops** over the summer to distribute information and educate Vermonters about the options available.
- The task force will engage **Town Energy Committees** to foster awareness, and education in their communities and further localize outreach.

➤ RELEASE \$1 MILLION TO STATE WEATHERIZATION PROGRAM

- State is on track to release an additional \$1 million into the traditional weatherization program that serves individuals and families at or below 60% of the median income. This will bring the program from \$7.7 million to \$8.7 million. This money will help community action agencies provide weatherization services to the most vulnerable population.

➤ INCREASE WEATHERIZATION FUNDING BY \$2 MILLION THRU CDBG

- Release an additional \$2 million in Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for weatherization can be used to assist Vermonters who do not qualify for the traditional state-funded weatherization program.

ACTION ITEMS:

- The Agency of Commerce will work with community programs to provide \$2 million more for weatherization efforts.

➤ **ESTABLISH VERMONT WEATHERIZATION REVOLVING LOAN FUND**

- Establish new no or low-interest capital program for efficiency and weatherization will that serve Vermonters not covered by traditional weatherization assistance.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Work with the Vermont Housing Finance Authority to provide between **\$16-20 million** in additional capital over next four years for weatherization activities. Utilizes \$9 million in state funds over four year period to guarantee loans, buy down interest rates, and pay administrative costs.
- This program will also serve Vermonters not eligible for traditional weatherization program, but still have substantial needs.

➤ **EXPAND QUALIFIED AND TRAINED CONTRACTOR CAPACITY FOR EFFICIENCY AND WEATHERIZATION ACTIVITIES**

- Expanding qualified and trained contractor capacity is necessary to keep up with market demand for these services activities.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Using Next Generation workforce training funding, the Department of Labor will give priority to workforce training proposals that provide training for employers seeking to expand their workforce in the fields of energy auditing, weatherization specialists, alternative energy system installers, and other professions that assist Vermonters with retrofitting existing homes for energy savings and building new energy efficient homes.
- The Agency of Human Services (AHS) and Efficiency Vermont will continue to work closely with Vermont Technical College, which has a program specializing in these areas.

➤ **REVIEW & UPDATE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLAN**

- A review of the state's preparedness plans will ensure Vermont is prepared to respond to a broad range of potential crises involving heating fuel.

ACTION ITEM:

- Lt. Governor Dubie will lead a review of "all hazards" emergency plan at Vermont Emergency Management Agency to assess preparedness in light of potential winter difficulties.

➤ **LAUNCH HOME HEATING SAFETY EDUCATION CAMPAIGN**

- It is important for Vermonters to know how to safely install, operate and maintain home heating appliances.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Lt. Governor Dubie will spearhead a **public education campaign** that warns of the dangers of faulty installation and operation of home heating appliances and informs Vermonters how to arrange for free safety inspections.
- To localize outreach, the Lt. Governor and Department of Public Safety's Fire Safety Division will work with CAPs and local fire departments.

➤ **PROMOTE SALES TAX HOLIDAY**

- Promoting the Sales Tax Holiday on Energy Star rated appliances will help educate Vermonters about the financial and environmental benefits of energy efficient appliances. A particular emphasis can be placed on efficient heating units under \$2,000.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Working with the Department of Marketing and Tourism, coordinate an aggressive marketing campaign highlighting the sales tax holiday, July 12th – July 18th.

GAS AND DIESEL STRATEGIES

“With \$4.00 per gallon gas, Vermonters are looking for ways to save money. We want to give commuters the tools they need to take advantage of more affordable transportation options.”

--Governor Jim Douglas
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➤ **LAUNCH CONNECTINGCOMMUTERS.ORG**

- Providing Vermonters with a portal for smart transportation alternatives will encourage commuting and use of alternatives to single-occupancy automobile commuting.
- The websites will serve as a clearing house for information on more affordable transportation options, including:

- Bus Route Times and Routes
- Park & Ride Locations by County
- Online Carpool Coordination and Message Board System (via 3rd party site)
- Tips for Fuel Conservation
- Pedestrian and Bicycling Routes
- Where to Find the Least Expensive Gasoline

ACTION ITEMS

- This site will be online June 12, 2008.
- Expand and upgrade site capabilities over the summer months with launch of Vermont specific rideshare software this fall.

➤ **EXPLORE AUXILIARY POWER UNIT (APU) ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

- An Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) assistance program for diesel trucks can help lower costs for truckers by using an APU instead of idling. These capital investments would quickly pay dividends with \$5.00 diesel.

ACTION ITEM:

- Working with the Vermont Truck and Bus Association, the task force and the Vermont Economic Development Agency (VEDA) are exploring low interest loans for APUs.

➤ **EXPEDITE EXPANSION OF PARK & RIDE CAPACITY**

- Demand for park & ride capacity is increasing. Expanding the state's park & ride capacity also promotes carpooling and use of public transportation.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Bring more than 200 new or upgraded park & ride spots online this summer – a 20% increase over current levels. This expansion includes 60 new spots at the Richmond facility.
- Building on work done by the Chittenden County MPO, VTrans will work with the MPO and Regional Planning Commissions to identify excess capacity in private lots and establish public-private partnerships to add additional Park & Ride spots in the short term.

FOOD STRATEGIES

“As food prices rise along with the cost of fuel, we will work together to make sure families don't go hungry in Vermont. There are some things state government can do to help, and there are other things that will require neighbor helping neighbor.”

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➤ **PROMOTE BUYING & EATING LOCAL**

- As the cost of transporting food from afar increases, locally produced products are increasingly affordable. Vermonters also want to know that their spending is also benefiting the local economy. If Vermonters shift just 10% of their food spending to local products, we would return over \$130 million to the local economy.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Launch new, and more aggressive, Buy Local promotional campaign through the Agency of Agriculture.
- Promote “Grow an Extra Row” with existing partners.
- Expand EBT and Debit program to 12 additional farmers markets—a total of 15 will be operational this summer.

➤ **EXPAND FOOD STAMP OUTREACH & ENROLLMENT**

- Only 70% of eligible Vermonters utilize food stamp services. Many of the remaining 30% are elderly Vermonters who would benefit significantly from the assistance.

ACTION ITEM:

- The task force will work with the Agency of Human Services (AHS) and its partners to implement an outreach and enrollment plan for the food stamp program.
- Continue to work with Vermont Food Bank to obtain \$1 million federal grant to promote increased access to food stamps for elderly Vermonters.

➤ **ENSURE THE CONTINUITY OF HOME-BASED SERVICES**

- Many Vermonters, particularly the elderly and individuals with disabilities, rely on home-based programs like Meals-on-Wheels for nutritious meals. As fuel and food costs increase, these programs will need to explore innovative approaches to ensure continuity of service.

ACTION ITEM:

- Lt. Governor Dubie will work with AHS and Area Agencies on Aging to ensure continuity of service for Meals-On-Wheels, and other home-based programs for older Vermonters.

➤ **PROMOTE PRIVATE DONATIONS TO FOOD SHELVES, MEALS-ON-WHEELS & OTHER PROGRAMS**

- As demand rises for assistance, we urge all Vermonters to respond to the increased need of community organizations, such as the Vermont Foodbank, community food shelves, Meals-on-Wheels, community action agencies and other charitable, non-profit services.

ACTION ITEM:

- The task force will work with its partners to develop a plan to promote private donations to charitable organizations that provide relief from rising food and fuel costs.

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