

February 3, 2006

CONTACT:

Dan Hopkins 303-866-6324

Mark Salley 303-866-6323

OWENS SIGNS BILL TO PROVIDE \$60 MILLION IN LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

(DENVER) - Gov. Bill Owens today signed HB-1200 authorizing \$20 million to the Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) to help poor families facing sharply higher heating costs this winter. The bill also authorizes \$7 million each year for the next three years, bringing the total LEAP support to \$41 million over four years.

Another important provision of the bill is the authorization of \$19 million - also paid out over a period of four years - to be used for energy efficiency weatherization programs that will help provide permanent reductions in heating costs for qualifying low-income families. The funding will be \$4 million this year and next, then increasing to \$5 million and \$6 million in the following two years.

"Every year, thousands of low-income families struggle to make ends meet and significantly higher heating costs have made this struggle even more difficult," Owens said. "The elderly, the disabled, the state's poorest families - these are the people who will benefit from these funds."

The money comes from mineral and energy severance taxes paid to the state. Owens noted that similar transfers from the severance taxes took place in 2001 and 2005. This makes a four-year commitment of funding.

The legislation was sponsored by Rep. Bernie Buescher (D-Grand Junction) and Rep. Jim Sullivan (R-Larkspur), along with Sen. Ken Kester (R-Las Animas) and Sen. Moe Keller (D-Wheat Ridge).

The Department of Human Services estimates that as many as 105,000 Colorado families will receive assistance from LEAP this winter. Last heating season, the program helped 96,127 families. A qualifying low-income family would receive an estimated benefit of approximately \$500 this winter, an increase of \$200 from the current average benefit of \$300.

LEAP also receives private donations, coordinated through Energy Outreach Colorado. This non-profit organization helps raise money year-round.

To qualify for LEAP, the applicant must be at or below the 185 percent level of the federal poverty index. For an individual, this would represent a maximum gross monthly income of \$1,475. For a family of two, the maximum monthly income would be \$1,978; for a family of three, \$2,481; for a family of four, \$2,983.

The Governor noted it now is even easier for Coloradans to help support Energy Outreach Colorado. Legislation passed in the 2005 session, which Owens signed in May, created a voluntary "check-off" program for donations to Energy Outreach. This will help provide a long-term, stable source of funding.

Starting next fall, gas and electric utility customers will simply check a box on their bill if they wish to participate. They will then make a monthly contribution as part of their utility bill payment. Consumers will decide the amount they wish to donate, and they can opt-out of the program whenever they choose.

To apply for LEAP assistance, call 1-866-HEAT HELP.

To donate to Energy Outreach Colorado, go to their [website](#).