



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

## State Senate Democrats Blast Senate Republicans For Failure To Act On The Home Heating Fuel Crisis

MALCOLM A. SMITH September 3, 2008

*State Senators meet with low and middle income families affected by surging energy costs*

(Elmont, NY) The Senate Democrats called for a special session to immediately pass their sweeping-legislation to provide energy relief this winter as they blasted the State Senate Republicans for failing to act to protect millions of New Yorkers.

State Senate Democratic Leader Malcolm A. Smith (D-St. Albans) joined by Senators Craig Johnson (D-Nassau) and Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D-Bronx), among others, announced their proposal for an innovative home energy assistance plan that would benefit over 2 million New York families.

Senator Smith said: "It's a shame that Senate Republicans failed to take action on a matter so important to all New Yorkers. At a time when the cost of home heating is exceeding the household income, we have to put party politics aside for the better interest of New Yorkers. At a special session last month, Senate Republicans failed to pass home heating legislation that would have provided relief to millions of New Yorkers, proving once again that they are out of touch with the issues that matter most. I am calling on Majority Leader Dean Skelos to convene a special session and join Senate Democrats in offering families the assistance they need."

Earlier this year, Senate Democrats released a comprehensive energy relief package calling for the Republican-majority to join in a bipartisan effort to pass legislation that would have saved taxpayers over \$1,000 per household.

State leaders in neighboring Connecticut recently responded to their energy concerns in a special session which approved \$79 million in energy assistance for consumers, public schools and nonprofit

organizations by a unanimous, bipartisan vote. Their legislation provides \$4 million towards residents ages 65 and older for heating assistance.

Senator Johnson said: “Many middle income families and seniors are so stretched to the breaking point that they increasingly have to choose between paying their heating bill, their mortgage, or going to the grocery store. The Senate Democrat plan would help many Long Island and New York state residents stay warm this winter and it is inexcusable that this current Senate Majority has kept it on ice.”

Like many New Yorkers, Elmont resident Mimi Pierre-Johnson has been faced with home heating oil prices that are one-third higher than last year. Pierre-Johnson said: “It is a frightening time. My energy costs are rising at a faster pace compared to my household income. I don't want to be priced out from losing my home, nor should I have to decide between purchasing food or medicine for my family. I am thankful to Senators Malcolm Smith and Craig Johnson for making this their priority and for addressing a serious issue impacting low and middle income families.”

State Senator Kevin Parker (D-Brooklyn), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Energy Committee. “Residents throughout the state need immediate help with their heating bills this winter. Our state and city are facing complex, urgent issues in terms of climate change, energy and economic growth. Meeting each of these challenges successfully will require, among other things, substantial investments in the electric and natural gas transmission and delivery infrastructure.”

The Senate Democrats 21st Century Energy Policy for New York package was largely in response to recent skyrocketing home energy costs and designed to help alleviate financial burdens on both homeowners and renters. Key components of the plan included:

§ Creation of a new Middle-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (MIHEAP) to provide emergency heating bill assistance to middle-class families making up to \$85,000 per year;

§ Expansion of the existing Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) by doubling the average benefit for the 2008-09 winter heating season for families making up to \$45,000 per year;

§ A large-scale investment in home weatherization improvements that will save families up to 40 percent on energy costs and create tens of thousands of new green jobs.

Senator Hassell-Thompson, ranking member of the Senate Consumer Protection Committee, said: “We know that families need fast help now, and we know that quality weatherization improvements can cut up to 40 percent from the cost of home energy. Our plan is sound public policy. Within this policy we will reduce the use of fossil fuel and create greener, more efficient and more affordable homes. It's the right

time to take strong action.”

Dan Cantor, Working Families Party Executive Director, said: “With the cost of fuel skyrocketing, New Yorkers already struggling with the weak economy will need relief from high costs of heating their homes this winter. But they'll also need it next winter and the winter after that--we need to think big. By greening New York's homes, we can greatly reduce energy costs for millions of working families and create tens of thousands of family-supported jobs to jumpstart the economy.”

Nassau County Executive Tom Suozzi said: “For some people high fuel prices are an inconvenience, but for others they mean a dangerous cold winter, and for others it means they can no longer afford to live on Long Island. It is critical that we help low and moderate income working families pay for heating in their homes this winter and I commend our State Senators for taking the initiative now to help Long Islanders and other New Yorkers stay in their homes.”

Invited guests included: Congress Members Steve Israel and Carolyn McCarthy; Assemblywoman Barbara Clark; Gwen O’Shea, President of the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island; and Lance W. Elder, President of Education & Assistance Corporation.

Senator Smith concluded: “Partisanship will not provide needed energy relief nor will it bring down heating costs. Neglecting problems will not make them go away. Real reform takes real work but after 40 years in control of the Senate, the Republicans have failed to realize this. I urge my colleague to join us in moving this much needed energy assistance plan forward, because the people of New York can wait no longer.”