

LETTERS

citizens cannot afford to heat their homes, cook their food or light their way.

The person without heat may be a senior citizen or a person with disabilities trying to make ends meet on a fixed income. The person without heat may be a parent, working one or two jobs and struggling to put food on the table for their children. The person without heat may be you or me.

In Oregon, we've hit a myriad of conditions for the perfect storm — rising energy rates, high unemployment and poverty rates, and winter weather — and Oregon residents are suffering.

At Community Action Organization, we're doing everything we can to help. Through the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) and Oregon Energy Assistance (OEA), and in partnership with Portland General Electric, 4,100 households received help with their heating bills between October 2001 and January 2002. Many of these families were facing shut-off of their heat because they could not afford to pay their utility bill. While local efforts increased emergency assistance for PGE customers, the need continues to outpace the resources available for families who heat with wood, gas, oil, and propane. Without additional funds, we estimate that we will be forced to turn away hundreds of local families — people facing disconnects of service, high arrearages on their bills, and the drafty, uncomfortable conditions of old housing that is so prevalent in low-income neighborhoods.

Throughout Washington County, 14,000 households qualify for assistance and Community Action has been receiving over 100 calls for assistance each day.

There is a partial and immediate solution to this problem. Through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, \$300 million is available in emergency assistance funds as part of LIEAP. The immediate release of these funds by

President Bush would allow community action agencies across Oregon to provide energy assistance to low income Oregonians who are in critical need. The \$300 million does *not* need to be appropriated — it was already designated for release in the event of an energy emergency this winter.

Washington County residents are facing just such an energy crisis and we are asking that these funds be released quickly. You can help by contacting President Bush and asking for the immediate release of emergency energy assistance funds for Oregon. The President's e-mail address is president@whitehouse.gov; <mailto:president@whitehouse.gov>; and the phone number for the White House is (202) 456-1414.

If you'd like more information about community action, please call Community Action Organization at (503) 693-3254; or our statewide association, Community Action Directors of Oregon, (503) 316-3951, cado@open.org.

Jeri Alcock
Community Action Organization

Heating funding needed in Oregon

Oregonians are going cold this winter. As the temperature plummets and the snow falls, many of our fellow