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Heating fuel and gasoline

October 19, 2008

By Louis Porter Vermont Press Bureau

Another energy problem looms over the campaign: the price of gasoline and heating fuel. Crude oil prices have dropped significantly in recent days to below \$70 a barrel, but that lower price will take some time to reach consumers.



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"It takes a month for crude oil to actually get to your tank," said Matt Cota of the Vermont Fuel Dealers Association. "Prices will go down, but there is a lag."

Although federal heating assistance for poorer Vermonters has increased, it is likely to remain a struggle for many. The Douglas administration this year started the food and fuel partnership, a referral service designed to connect Vermonters in need to services like weatherization grants or low interest loans, workshops and other help.

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Douglas said utilizing the 2-1-1 service provided by the United Ways of Vermont and the state's community action agencies to help struggling Vermonters just made sense.

"Why not use their professional information and referral personnel?" the governor asked. "We have infrastructure already, why would we duplicate?"

In addition, the state will work with fuel dealers and banks and others to make sure residents can get heating fuel, Douglas said.

"I know that Vermonters appreciate the extensive and comprehensive approach I have put in place," he said.

Pollina criticizes Douglas' response to the problem.

"It is way too little too late. All of this stuff should have been done last year or earlier," he said. "There is a lot of hot air coming out of Montpelier; it is not going to keep anybody warm."

Pollina also asserts "there could have been some effort to do some bulk buying" of heating fuel, and the state should use its "rainy day" reserves to do more for those having a hard time affording fuel.

Douglas has said the rainy day fund needs to be held in reserve in case the weakening economic climate and state revenues continue to worsen.

Symington wants to counteract fluctuating fuel prices through a home efficiency program. She said the state should provide direct weatherization assistance to middle-income Vermonters. Homeowners would then pay off loans over time for efficiency improvements through their utility bills.



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Such home weatherization efforts would eventually result in less demand for heating oil, she said.

"When Vermonters pay a dollar, 85 cents of it is going to Sarah Palin's state, or a country that doesn't like us very much," she said.

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