

# Government To Assist Record Number With Winter Heating Bill

**RALEIGH** — An estimated 300,000 low-income households across the state will be eligible for financial help with their heating bills this winter through the federal Low-Income Energy Assistance Program.

According to George Flemming, assistant director for Program Administration, N. C. Department of Human Resources, Division of Social Services, "the program provides a one-time payment to help eligible households pay their heating bills. However, it is not the purpose of the program to pay all of the household's heating bills, but to provide some relief from the high costs of energy."

Last year, approximately 210,000 households received assistance under the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program with payments averaging \$155 per household. The lowest payment was \$59.00 and the highest \$361. The amount of payment a household received depended on the number of people in the household, their income, the region of the state where they lived and the type of heating fuel used.

North Carolina's share of the \$1.875 billion in federal funds authorized by Congress for this year's Low-Income Energy Assistance Program is \$35.6-million. Flemming said that since Congress has not yet appropriated any funds for the program, he hopes this amount is not reduced when funds are appropriated.

The Department of Human Resources has been designated as the state agency responsible for administration of the program. County social services departments across the state will determine eligibility.

The only households that may be eligible for financial assistance are those that have heating bills. For those in a private living arrangement, their heating cost may be included in the rent. Households that live in public housing or receive a utility allowance from the HUD Section 8 Program will be eligible for a partial payment if their utility allowance does not cover all their heating costs.

Eligible households must have total countable income at or below the non-farm poverty level. The amount paid for Medicare and hospital insurance premiums are deducted from income. Households that have working members may deduct work related and child care costs from their earned income. Some other types of income are not counted at all such as loans, income of children under 14 and in-kind contributions.

The non-farm poverty level for different size households is: one in household - \$316 monthly, two - \$418 monthly, three - \$519, four, - \$621, five \$723, six - \$824 and for seven or more \$102 is added for each additional person.

In addition to these income limits, a household's financial assets must have a value of \$2200 or less. All assets will be counted except household or personal belongings, cars, home income producing property, insurance, value of prepaid burial contracts, savings of a student under 18 is saving his money for school expenses, relocation assistance payments, money in a checking account to meet monthly needs, non-salable life estate or remainder interests, heir property

and HUD community development block grants.

Unlike last year when households who were receiving Supplemental Security Income, food stamps or AFDC did not have to apply, all households will be required to apply for the Low Income

Energy Assistance Program this year. Elderly or handicapped individuals may send a representative to apply for them or call their county social services department for other arrangements.

County social services departments began

taking applications for the program on November 1, 1981. They will continue to accept applications through December 11, 1981. Priority will be given to the elderly and handicapped. County social services departments will be working with local councils on aging and other

groups to make sure the elderly and handicapped know about the program and have access to the application process.

"A one-time payment will be made in early February after all low-income households have applied and eligibility has been

determined. Again this year, payments will vary based on the income of each household and where they live. The type of heating fuel used will also affect the amount of payment. Thus, the lowest income households, living in the coldest region of the state,

having to use the most expensive type of fuel will receive the highest payments," Flemming said. He stated that county social services departments are taking on the added responsibility for this complex program along with numerous changes

they are being required to implement in other programs they administer because of changes in federal regulations. "However, I am confident that county departments will do a good job in administering the program," Flemming concluded.

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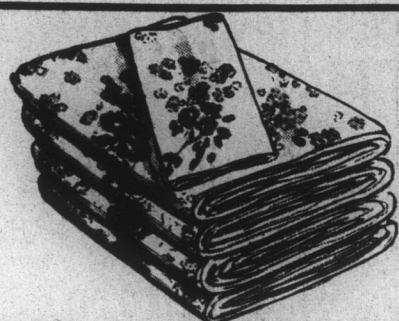
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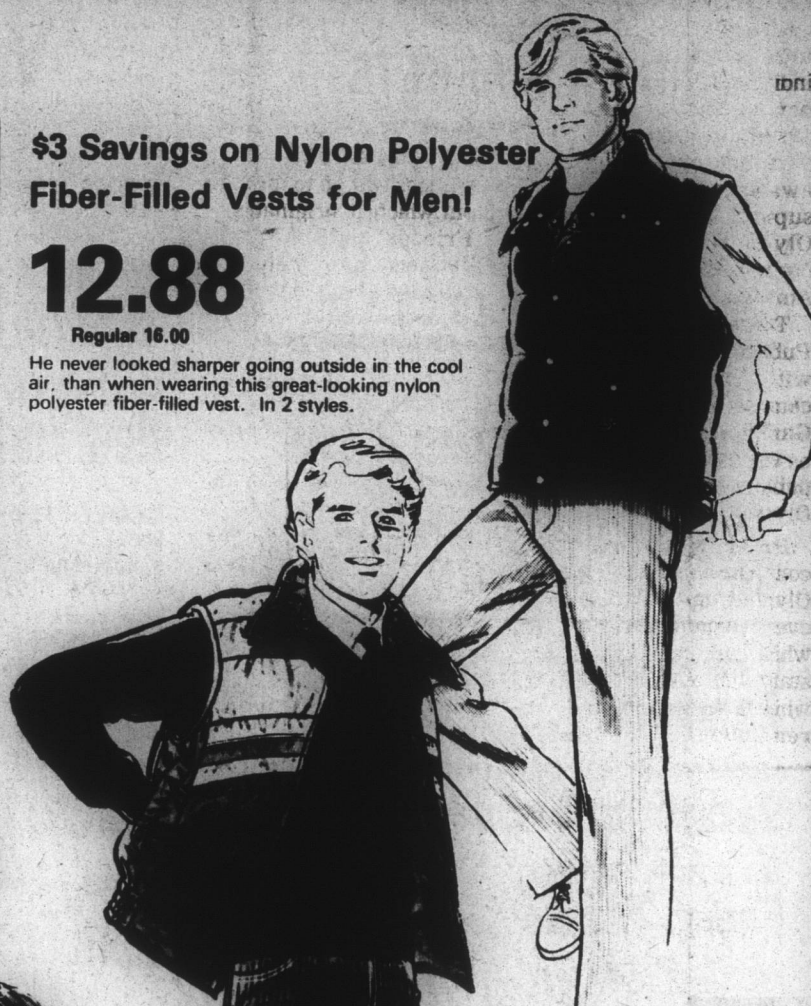
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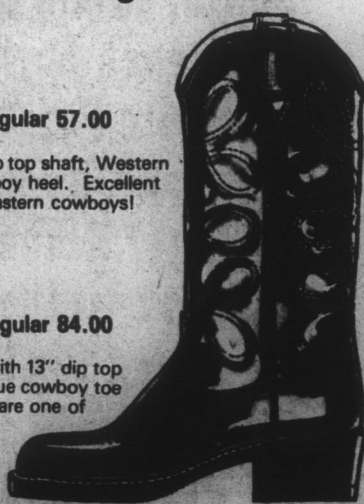
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