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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**LAWMAKERS PUSH PRESIDENT TO RELEASE EMERGENCY HEATING FUNDS:  
SANDERS SAYS PRESIDENT MUST ACT IMMEDIATELY**

Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and over 135 Members of Congress today fired off a letter to President Clinton urging the release of \$300 million from the emergency heating reserve fund.

Sanders, joined by 15 Democrats and Republicans at a national press conference, said he organized the campaign to demand the release of the funds because the budget stalemate in Congress has put lives at risk in several states.

"The failure to enact the Labor-HHS-Education spending bill has resulted in massive shortfalls in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs, and forced many states to operate their programs on an 'emergency only' basis. Because these cold weather states spend most of the program funds during the winter months, a budget agreement in February, March or April will not prevent people from suffering in the cold today," Sanders said.

Sanders said recent winter weather across the nation has clearly shown heating assistance funding must be released to the states now. "A weekend cold snap took twelve lives. Three deaths were attributed to the cold in Milwaukee, and 5,200 people were brought into warming centers in Chicago. In St. Johnsbury, Vermont, the temperature dropped to 15 below zero. We are asking the president to release these emergency heating funds now in order to prevent millions of low-income families from suffering and being displaced from their homes over the next few weeks and into the winter."

The lawmakers noted that an estimated 6.1 million households received low-income heating assistance funds last year. Three quarters of the households had incomes less than \$8,000 per year.

"Regardless of how Congress finally settles funding for the LIHEAP program, low-income families in our states can no longer wait for heating fuel. People are suffering today. The budget impasse will only worsen the situation," Sanders said.

Sanders said the small amount of LIHEAP funds received in Vermont so far has only helped families with dire, life-threatening emergencies. "Community action groups throughout the state, the Governor's Hot Line and my District Office have been flooded with calls from people who are either out of fuel or for whom crisis is imminent. Religious and volunteer groups are trying to help, but they cannot possibly make up for the loss of LIHEAP funding. Unless the president takes emergency action, our states will only be able to provide heat to a fraction of the households in need of heating assistance this winter."

Sanders said he hopes the letter will send a strong message to the president. "We have more than a quarter of the House membership on board. Key Democrats who have influence with the President have signed the letter, as have key Republicans who have weight in Congress." Sanders noted that thirteen GOP Full-Committee and Subcommittee Chairs have joined the group in signing the letter to the President.

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