

June Legislative Wrap-Up

Comprehensive Energy Conservation, Efficiency & Affordability Act of 2006 - a "Declaration of Crisis"

After a 5-year effort, RI passed the "Comprehensive Energy Conservation, Efficiency & Affordability Act of 2006," which contains two provisions that benefit low-income households. By November 2007, utility companies must implement new plans to: 1) restore utility shut-offs that caps the down-payment at 25% (instead of 25% to 50+%), forgives 37.25% of past due amounts and has a 36-month payment plan; and 2) discount electric, gas and heating oil rates up to 25% off on standard usage amounts. One provision has the potential to benefit all consumers: one seat on the new, governor-appointed Energy Efficiency and Resources Management Council shall "give due consideration" to low-income consumer interests. While there is no guarantee that a low-income consumer, or low-income advocate, will be appointed, at least Rhode



What happened with P.I.P.P.?

Islander consumers now have an opportunity have a seat at the table to discuss energy resource development, efficiency, and conservation.

Representative Art Handy, who introduced P.I.P.P. (Percentage of Income Payment Plan) legislation,

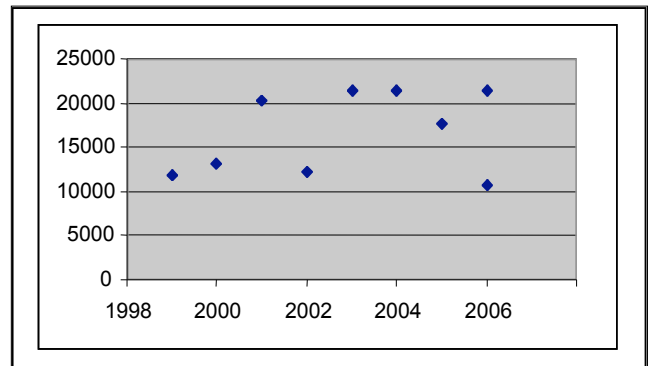
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Affordable Energy: Let's make a deal with National Grid

RI Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty sets out demands for the newly merged electric and gas companies.

Over two dozen Wiley Center members, representing the RI Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty, testified at the June 29th Division of Public Utilities hearing on the merger between the British owned National Grid and New England Gas. The Wiley Center successfully petitioned the state to be present as an "interested party" to the merger and its impact on consumers. Members requested written assurances from National Grid on the following demands:

- Winter Moratorium on shut-off for all customers
- End to shut-offs in home with pre-school children
- Reduction to 10% (from 25%) payment required on past balances prior to restoration of service
- Separate billing for gas and electric bills
- Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) & 50% forgiveness on back bills for LIHEAP eligible homes
- Automatic annual write-off of \$500 on past due utility balances for low-income income households



Shut-offs for 2006 projected at historic highs

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Anniversary Celebration & Salute to Henry's 40 years of Raising Hell

The George Wiley Center held a big celebration party for its 25th year anniversary and for the first 40 years of dedicated fighting for justice by Henry Shelton, founder, Coordinator. We tried to roast Henry; but we are talking about the man Mayor Cicilline dubbed the "conscience of Rhode Island" and honored by declaring June 21st as "Henry Shelton Day" in Providence. Jack McKenna produced a terrific oral history video with humor, war stories and personal vignettes shared by family, friends, clergy and co-conspirators in the street battle for economic justice.

The Board of Directors, especially Fundraising Committee Chair Cathy Collette, did a great job pulling together a successful, fun and colorful event. Wiley Board President Steve Graham and member Cheryl Albright kept the program moving. Folks who have been part of the Wiley Center over the years, reunited over wine and protest memories. The number of contributors to date in 2006 is up by 658 people over last year's total number of contributors.

And, why were we there? Not just because it was a great fundraiser, netting over \$23,000.00. Board member Betsy Florin designed centerpieces out of children's shoes stuffed with protest signs, reminding everyone that the Rhode Island Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty requires walking the picket line, holding signs, raising our voices together and demanding economic and social justice. Carol Shelton reminded us of George Wiley's words printed on bookmarks: "When do you win, George?" asked Barbara Williams in a conversation on his engagement in the struggle. "When there are not any more poor people, he replied." George Wiley, 1973.

Many thanks to Board Members for all their hard work -- and to Bill Flynn & the Rhode Island Community Food Bank for hosting the event. To sponsors MetLife Home & Auto, MotleyRice, AFSME Council 94, RI AFT, Laborers' New England Region, Providence American, Citizen's Bank, National Grid, the Collette Family, Pat Houlihan, Bob McConnell, the O'Hara's, Carol Shelton (of course), and all who showed their support, worked, gave and had a good time with us: **THANK YOU!** ❖

Second Story Theatre contributes a performance

Maureen Reddy, Ph.D.

Mary Tucker Thorp College Professor 2005-06
Professor of English and Women's Studies, Rhode Island College

Many thanks to Warren's Second Story Theater, especially Artistic Director Ed Shea and Executive Director Lynne Collinson, for making the June 4 performance of *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* a fundraiser for the George Wiley Center. Second Story's script-in-hand production of Daniel Berrigan's 1970 play about the 1968 trial of antiwar activists for removing draft records in Catonsville, MD, and burning them with crude napalm transported the capacity audience to those heady days of a vibrant peace movement. The issues the play raises—peace, justice, activism, personal and collective responsibility for our government's actions—are as important now as they were when the Catonsville Nine stood trial, and fit very well with the Wiley Center's mission. Second Story donated the gross proceeds to the Wiley Center; at \$25 per ticket, we raised almost \$3000. Seldom is a fundraiser so thought-provoking and powerful—we are all grateful to Second Story for a terrific experience! ❖

Support the Wiley Center from Work

The George Wiley Center is a founding member of the Fund for Community Progress, a network of 26 community-based grassroots agencies working together for long-term social change, cultural awareness and for creating safe, livable communities for people in need. More than 95 workplaces currently participate in the Fund so that individual contributions promote "change, not charity."

If your employer participates in the Fund for Community Progress, please designate the **George A. Wiley Center**, to receive your workplace contribution. Call Liz at the Wiley Center to find out how you can help bring the opportunity for giving to the Wiley Center to your workplace in time for the end of year campaign. ❖



National Grid Merger

In a narrow, judicial ruling made by Thomas Ahern, Administrator of the Division of Public Utilities, the merger was approved without conditions. Board member and *pro bono* legal representative for the George Wiley Center, Jean Rosiello, Esq., noted that "The law requires the merger to be consistent with the public interest. The Division rejected the argument that that means any merger must be beneficial to the public. Mergers must only avoid hurting the public."

In the Hearing Officer's written decision, Mr. Ahern indicated that he would recommend that the gas and electric bills stay separate so that no one will lose electric service for being behind on gas payments and vice versa. We appreciate that one of the six basic demands has been recommended.

However, we want the comprehensive new rules being written to include a compassionate attitude for elderly, children, sick, poor and hard-working low-income people who juggle with late payments and skimp on food to keep the heat on. With expected revenues of over \$1.2 billion, healthy profits and strong shareholder returns, National Grid, and its allies in the Division of Public Utilities and on the Public Utilities Commission, have no good reason to not treat other human beings with dignity. Neither misfortune nor greed is an excuse for mistreatment. There are limitations to the new Energy Bill, and so pressing our case to the Division of Public Utilities is critical, especially during this interim period when the implementation details of the new law are being decided. ❖

**Block Island Power Co. Bans utility shut-offs on hot days
Rhode Island's 1st action to keep it cool!**

Leaders of the RI Campaign Initiate Summer Moratorium

At the Leadership Committee meeting in July, Maggie Rogers spoke up, "Without fans or air conditioners or breathing machines, people with asthma, and the elderly especially, can dehydrate in extreme heat." Members voted to demand a moratorium on electric shut-offs during Ozone Alert Days. Submitting the required number of petition signatures on July 28th, we put the item on the Division of Public Utilities agenda, setting of a flurry of press coverage and a stream of political support -- in the full heat wave of election season. Keep the heat on! ❖

RHODE ISLAND CAMPAIGN TO ELIMINATE CHILDHOOD POVERTY

This membership organization of the George Wiley Center is open to all those who want to "come up with a winning plan, and make it happen." Members decide on what changes to focus on, decide on specific goals and take action. Join us...

MEMBERSHIP MEETING SCHEDULE

LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE - SEPT. 9TH

PLACE: GEORGE WILEY CENTER, 32 EAST AVE., PAWTUCKET

Time: 10:00 AM

EAST PROVIDENCE CHAPTER – AUGUST 29TH

PLACE: RIVERSIDE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, 15 OAK AVE.

Time: 7:00 PM

PAWTUCKET CHAPTER - AUGUST 3RD

PLACE: GEORGE WILEY CENTER, 32 EAST AVENUE (AT ROOSEVELT)

Time: 6:30 PM

PROVIDENCE CHAPTER* - AUGUST 9TH

PLACE: KNIGHT MEMORIAL LIBRARY, 275 ELMWOOD AVENUE

TIME: 6:00 PM

* Call Julie for info on orientation meetings in Providence.

NEWPORT/AQUIDNECK CHAPTER - AUGUST 22ND

PLACE: FLORENCE GRAY CENTER, 1 YORK ST, NEWPORT

Time: Noon

SOUTH COUNTY CHAPTER- AUGUST 31ST

PLACE: CHRIST THE KING CHURCH, 180 OLD NORTH ROAD, KINGSTON

Time: 7:00 PM

WARWICK CHAPTER - AUGUST 28TH

PLACE: JONAH COMMUNITY CENTER, 830 OAKLAND BEACH AVE.

Time: 7:00 PM

WOONSOCKET CHAPTER - AUGUST 8TH

PLACE: WOONSOCKET-HARRIS LIBRARY, 303 CLINTON STREET

TIME: 6:30 PM

RI Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty: Actions Around RI

PROVIDENCE: FOOD STAMPS & OPERATION O.J.

It only takes one: When Wiley Center Organizer, Julie Silvia followed-up a Campaign meeting at a Providence Head Start location when one parent/new member reported her appalling experience at her food stamp "Group" recertification appointment and the breach of everyone's right to confidentiality in the group. Two days later, a small group of 8 members protested group recertification and member Iasha met with DHS Administrator to discuss the violations. With publicity and outreach to social service agencies, reports emerged of more incidents of violations group recertification emerged, along with complaints on the lengthy paperwork required, slow service, lack of telephone accessibility and low benefits. Campaign for O.J. (Operation Justice) was born.

Follow-up resulted in the Regional Food & Nutrition Service office re-issuing group recertification guidelines to all involved workers and supervisors in Rhode Island. With Rhode Island's fall to 31st place nation-wide in food stamp participation, recertification problems are hot on the agenda at the public Food Stamp Advisory Committee meetings.

According to Dennis Grilli, Executive Director of AFSME Council 94, there are 10 job vacancies that could be filled at DHS offices. These jobs are 50% federally funded (food stamp are 100% funded). The benefits to recipients and the local economy are clear. "\$1 [of spending] in food stamps generates nearly \$2 of economic activity" (FRAC 2006 State of the States, p. 9). The lack of reform and appropriate staffing is government mismanagement and public neglect. The Wiley Center and AFSME support filling these positions with weekend and/or evening shift workers. The Wiley Center supports hiring from the current FIP rolls so parents losing benefits can transition into good state jobs.

Anyone experiencing problems with food stamp recertification is encouraged to contact the George Wiley Center to: complete a survey so we can document violations, let us know that you called Jane Haywood with your complaint, or volunteer to represent the Campaign -at Food Stamp Advisory meetings and other supportive actions. ❖

Warwick members' success in the Summer Nutrition site expansion helped to boost RI from 13th up to 12th place in participation nation-wide!

PROVIDENCE CHAPTER: LATE BREAKING VICTORY

Through the persistent and dedicated efforts of campaign members Sandra Kelly and Linda Bouley (Woonsocket), Lela Coons (Warwick), Frances Daherty (E. Providence) and Kathi Riley Jones (Providence), Tom Ahern, Administrator of the Division of Public Utilities, agreed to institute a utility "pilot" plan for 10% down and 36 months to pay back bills in order for service restoration. One Providence member immediately benefited at her informal hearing at the Division of Public Utilities on August 2nd. Julie Silvia is urging anyone throughout the state that is in danger of utility shut-offs to call the Wiley Center for strategic advice and empowerment training prior to scheduling a hearing at the PUC. ❖

SCHOOL BREAKFAST GAINS GROUND

The universal free breakfast pilot program in Woonsocket Middle School and at Bernon Heights Elementary School was successful. The number of breakfasts served doubled for at both schools, with 71.60% of these served to children in February from households with income at or below 130% of federal poverty line. The Superintendent, Dr. Macera, expressed her support for the extension of universal breakfast to all Woonsocket Schools during a meeting with Henry Shelton and Woonsocket members on August 1st. The School Committee will vote on the matter later this month.

Members gained key community and school committee support, but not enough to win universal breakfast in Newport this fall. The Superintendent agreed to form a committee with Campaign members to increase the participation of eligible children in the existing school breakfast program. Providing the 40+% of Newport students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch eligible with extra nutritional support through a federally subsidized program is the responsibility of the Newport School system. Currently, only 19% of free and reduced lunch eligible children are served breakfast. Members are urged contact all candidates for the Newport School Committee on this academically related issue.

The East Providence pilot program in two schools showed success. Since our last issue, West Warwick piloted universal breakfast district-wide. ❖

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Wrap-Up on New Energy Bill

secured an amendment to the Act, helping the 13,159 families whose electric or gas has been shut-off so far and the anticipated total of 22,000 families this year!

This amendment is in **effect from September 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007**. Very-low-income people (those at or below 125% federal poverty line) whose service has been shut-off must pay 18% (instead of the 25% under the new law) of the past due balance for service restoration. The Handy Amendment includes 50% forgiveness of the back due balance, provided participants stay current and pay 1/36 the remaining balance due monthly for 3 years.

"Low-income residents already have trouble paying their current monthly high utility bills. That's why they get behind. Now they will be trying to pay current bills plus a portion of the old bill; they will have a hard time staying in the program," notes Shelton. "Once they are out of program, they can't get back on it. Then what?"

The original Percentage of Income Payment Plan backed by the Wiley Center extended to LIHEAP eligible persons (225% of poverty or \$22,050/year for a one-person household) and would limit monthly utility bills to 6% of monthly income, just as Section 8 Housing works by limiting rent to 25% of income. This way, people could afford to pay the bill for this necessity. The Wiley Center continues to fight for a reinstatement of this previously successful program, which can be implemented by PUC and National Grid.

Bottom line - The new law is short on affordability for the projected 22,000 RI families shut off from utility service in 2006. This winter, no prevention measures are in effect for the dangerous situation these families will confront when their cash resources won't stretch far enough. Funds for energy assistance, drawn from existing taxes, include payment to utility companies to compensate for losses on discount sales made to "very low-income" people. Low income (between 60% RI median income and 125% poverty) will get discounts "if feasible." Meanwhile, RI remains the only New England state that does not add to the federal LIHEAP funds. Our energy bill is drafty; let's plug the leaks.

Mass Mobilization vs., Poverty & Homelessness leads to legislation

The ripple effect from our largest attended workshop at our February Action Conference energized participants. Joining the "Emergency Campaign for Rhode Island's Priorities" coalition, we reversed several cutbacks in FIP benefits and childcare proposed by Governor Carcieri.

Members joined "The Journey Home" 5-day March from Westerly, RI to the State House rotunda, where die-hard participants slept-in to dramatize the plight of the homeless. The state legislature funded various affordable housing options, including a \$50 million voter referendum bond for the production of affordable homes, \$7.5 million for the Neighborhood Opportunities Program and \$300,000 for the Supportive Services Program.

"Circuit Breaker" Tax Break

The state housing grant fund was increased so renters and elderly with incomes under \$30,000 per year can receive their maximum allowable tax rebate (\$250 for FY 2005). A \$4,000,000 increase was authorized for 2007, raising the FY 2006 tax rebate to \$300 per qualified income tax filer.

Earned Income Tax Credit

Low-income Rhode Islanders filing state income taxes for FY 2005 and 2006 benefit from the \$4,000,000 added to the budget for RI Earned Income Tax Credit. This doubles the maximum allowable limit from FY 2004, resulting in an average increase in EIC filers' returns by \$35.00. Also, the EITC limit was raised from 3% of the federal amount to 5% for FY 2007.

Minimum Wage Increase

We won a 2-year increase in RI minimum wage from \$6.75 to \$7.40, one of the nation's highest. ❖

Staff comings & goings

Changes in Operations

Most have heard the news that Bill Flynn, Operations Manager and Coordinator of the RI Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty has left the George Wiley Center after nine years of service. Well loved and missed, Bill is wished well in his new post as Director of Community Programs at the Rhode Island Community Food Bank by staff and members. We are happy to report that Bill "keeps in touch" and continues to promote the social justice goals of the George Wiley Center whenever the opportunity arises. Thanks, Bill!!

New on board as Operations Manager at the Wiley Center is Liz Marsis. Liz has a background in non-profit program development, grant writing, small business management, as well as experience as Director of Religious Education for the Unitarian Universalists. Charged with fund raising and membership development, she's plunged (with the Board's help) into upgrading the office systems for improved outreach capabilities. Welcome, Liz! ❖

Acknowledgment of Friends' Passing

Two losses impacted the George Wiley Center this month. Labor advocate, friend to many in the community and Wiley supporter, Chuck Schwartz, Director of the Labor Institute of Rhode Island, will be missed by all who know him. Sympathies are extended to Lissa Dreyer for the loss of her partner, Joe. Lissa, for personal reasons, resigned last month from her renewed term on the Wiley Center Board of Directors. Our thoughts are with her. ❖

WISH LIST

- ✓ Two computers with Windows XP 2000
- ✓ A mouse with memory stick or memory stick drive
- ✓ Quickbooks, version 2004 or later
- ✓ File Cabinets & Bookcases
- ✓ Digital Camera

Volunteers for: Spanish translations, representing the Wiley Center & RI Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty at local town and state agency public meetings, local media reps and Database entry clerks. Contact Liz at georgewileycenter1@verizon.net or call 728-5555. ❖

ADDITIONAL THANKS to John Howat for his expert testimony at PUC hearings, John Colby for his ongoing poverty research, and Steven Kapalka, Linda Kushner, Mary and Michael Schwartz and Dan Rothenberg, and those remain unnamed for their contributing financial support. ❖

GEORGEWILEYCENTER.ORG

Thanks to a volunteer offer by our web designer and web host, Rod Rodriguez of NEWeb Designs, our website will be undergoing a major overhaul. Compatibility with software for the visually impaired, ease of navigation and updating, informational depth and interactivity are planned. Leadership Committee member Dr. John Farley volunteered to work on the website development. Ideas and volunteers welcome.

E-news: *If you are interested in receiving future issues of the Wiley Center QuarterNews via e-mail, please email your name, snail mail and email contact information to georgewileycenter1@verizon.net. Thanks for helping us save mailing costs and having a lighter footprint on the environment.*



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