

Dear City Council Members:

There are many arguments that have been given for support of a moratorium on energy costs for the disadvantaged. I do not have anything further to add to the specific arguments, as most points have been very well presented.

Instead I would ask Council members, as well as all of us here, to consider the well known phrase, "But by the grace of God go I". We live in challenging times, and nothing is for sure. We may feel reasonable secure in our daily lives, but it should be always tempered with compassion for those less fortunate, as the tides can always change.

In closing let me speak about Ashland as a family. It is the whole of the people, that make Ashland the town that it is, for both the rich and the poor equally contribute to it's personality. And to deny those less fortunate who are members of the Ashland family, is to create an Ashland that is less than it's full potential.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "BILL SAUARD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and "S".

**Bill Savard, RN
Boardmember, Jackson County Fuel Committee**

JACKSON COUNTY WORKERS BENEFIT COUNCIL

Presentation delivered by Jose Reyes

Hello, my name is Jose R. I am here tonight on behalf of the Jackson County Workers Benefit Council to express our support of the resolution introduced by Jackson County Fuel Committee calling for a moratorium on utility shutoffs.

I would first like to thank Mr. Jones for his efforts on behalf of all people living in sub-standard, some might say 'sub-human,' conditions in our community.

The Jackson County Workers Benefit Council is a body of delegates that represent the interest of various grouping of low-income and seasonal workers in Jackson County. The JCWBC was formed in 1976. One of the responsibilities of the WBC is to oversee the delivery of resources through Northwest Seasonal Worker's Association's self-help 11 point benefit program. In 1978 the Workers Benefit Council authorized the formation of Jackson County Fuel Committee as many NSWA members then, as now, were faced with the choice of heating their homes or feeding their families. NSWA initially provided firewood through a supplemental benefit but the need became too great and required the building of a separate organization. Thus Jackson County Fuel Committee came into being through NSWA members joining with other concerned community residents that would work year round to fight for peoples' right to heat versus a privilege. JCFC eventually expanded its benefit program to include utility advocacy for families facing an electrical or natural gas shutoff as well as home weatherization projects.

JCFC became a leading example of a community grassroots organization helping the most vulnerable members of the community survive during the winter which includes, but is not limited to, the poor and the elderly. We know that JCFC saves an average of six lives a year.

The Workers Benefit Council meets every week to discuss the common issues we face as workers who are traditionally not covered or recognized by the labor laws. We discuss real solutions to the problems all workers face in our valley. Our council is comprised of many different people from various social, religious and ethnic backgrounds; however, we share one thing in common – we all face economic hardships due to low paying jobs. Jobs that only provide a minimum wage not a living wage with few or no benefits at all.

For thirty years, our council has been fighting alongside like-minded individuals to help working people not only have a voice in the community, but to also gain access to real and necessary resources like emergency food, clothing, legal assistance, and medical attention, through organizations like the Northwest Seasonal Workers Association, who have been a life line to thousands in our community including NSWA's members that now number upwards of thirty thousand in our county alone. Thirty thousand that have supported and been part of working for solutions to the many problems we face and that knowing individually our power and resources are limited but together our ability to survive and organize the resources we need to survive are attainable.

Conditions:

The conditions many of our council members and their constituencies face are deplorable. We have reports of hard working people who can only afford to have their heater on for an hour a day and even then they can only heat one room in the house while the extremities of the house are, as one council member put it, “like walking outside.”

When we have families who can only afford to heat one room at a time as a result of their economic conditions, dear friends, something is seriously wrong. The richest country on the planet has a large portion of the population living as if this was a third world nation. If you cannot believe this, I ask that you accompany us on a house to house canvass to see first hand the horrible realities that a majority of our members face on a daily basis.

The truth is that most older run down homes and apartment complexes do not provide much in the way of insulation and weatherization.

When a working person enjoys the “luxury” of keeping the heat on during the winter months, most of the heat escapes outside, leaving our people, along with their children, in the cold and facing huge bills they cannot afford to pay.

The most vulnerable citizens in our community live in rented housing. Weather proofing programs are only available to homeowners and even then, those homeowners have to pay out of pocket to contractors with only tax credits or rebates to offset the costs of weatherizing.

In our valley, children and the elderly are getting sick due to the lack of heat and proper nutrition because of the amount of money going toward utilities to keep the heat on cuts deeply into what is available in the family budget for food and other survival needs.

And how can I fail to mention our members living in the rural areas. When their electricity is shut off, their wells which are run by electric pumps, are rendered useless and then not only is the electricity gone but their source of water is cut off, leaving unsanitary conditions that no one should be allowed to live under in this day and age.

I do not think that any one in our community can debate the fact that good paying manufacturing jobs are leaving and are being replaced by low-paying, part time and temporary jobs in the service and retail industry – a disturbing trend, to say the least. So it is no wonder that people cannot make ends meet.

Statistics:

I would also like to present some sobering statistics for all of you to think about when making the ruling on JCFC’s proposed moratorium. According to the Oregonian, **one out of five or about 700,000** people in Oregon can no longer make ends meet. **The \$20,000 to \$39,000 median wage for a year for a family of four just is not enough.** Economic conditions in Oregon are more severe than other states because wages are rising slower than the cost of living. **Nearly half of Oregon renters pay more than a 1/3 of their income for housing, the third highest in the nation.**

Furthermore, cuts in the Oregon Health Plan and surging health care costs have pushed the number of uninsured Oregonians to more than **609,000 or one in six** in the population – the steepest in the nation. We now have double the number of Oregonians receiving food stamps compared to six years ago.

The reality is that the Oregon economy has shifted toward low-wage industries and at least half the jobs lost in Oregon have been in high wage industries like manufacturing,

logging, and fishing. Jobs that before allowed working class Oregonians to earn a stable living.

Now, I must turn our attention to heating cost statistics even though Mr. Jones has done a superb job of informing the public on the cold economic facts we all face. Between 2001 and 2005 **gas bills in the northwest have risen 53%. PGE bills have risen 39%**, not to mention **heating oil bills which have risen an outrageous 93%**. Low-income families now spend 10-30% of their income on energy bills.

Ladies and gentleman, there is a war going on and I am not speaking of the ones in Iraq or Afghanistan, but the war on the poor and impoverished right here in front of us. Seen, but often ignored.

We have no problem when companies make profit, but when it is at the expense of our citizens we must draw the line. I ask how many lives will companies endanger in the name of profit before they realize they are killing our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers and children Or perhaps, they will care when it starts cutting into their profits, who can say for sure?

In conclusion, I would like to say that I have not even scratched the surface of the amount of suffering caused by poor economic conditions in our area. It certainly in no way does the suffering masses of people justice.

It is the duty of all in a leadership position to ensure the well-being of the most economically unstable people in our community. At this point, I am sure that given the facts, who can possibly be against such a humane and just policy?

It is the position of the Workers Benefit Council and anyone who has a sense of justice and humanity, that this moratorium be enacted. We, also, must make abundantly clear here that until the average worker makes a living wage none of us are safe economically. We working people are the motor that makes our economy work and if we have more money in our pockets, it not only benefits us, but the community as a whole.

I also want to remind the community that when I speak these words I do not speak alone. I speak for close to thirty thousand low-paid workers throughout our county. Workers whose very survival is dependant on our willingness to help one another through economic difficulties. Some may ask why there are so little accompanying me tonight, well, we must remember that when living paycheck to paycheck even missing one day of work can be disastrous to a family living with the realities of low incomes.

We speak from a sensuous experience, watching our families suffer year after year from something beyond our control.

So, with that I am honored and humbled to be chosen to speak these words on behalf of the Jackson County Workers Benefit Council who not only support this moratorium, given our historical ties with the Jackson County Fuel Committee, but we feel it is our sacred and moral duty to support them in supplying the poor with extra protection given the economic conditions over which they have no control. I would, at this time, like to express my thanks to the Ashland City Council for giving us the time to express our position on this matter and to ask YOU to support this very necessary moratorium.

Thank you.

**PRESENTATION BY RANDY JONES, OPERATIONS MANAGER,
JACKSON COUNTY FUEL COMMITTEE delivered on Tuesday,
February 21, 2006 regarding resolution for adoption by ASHLAND CITY
COUNCIL to establish a WINTER MORATORIUM on utility shut-offs.**

Hello and good evening. My name is Randy Jones. I am the Operations Manager for Jackson County Fuel Committee, an all-volunteer, non-government funded, membership association comprised of the many people in the Rogue Valley who believe that low-paid workers, and those who are elderly, retired or disabled living on fixed incomes, need to have access to the necessities of life and be free of the totally avoidable suffering caused by those who would gouge them for their meager but hard-earned money.

Since 1978, business people, students, housewives, doctors, lawyers, clergy and other concerned residents have joined JCFC in an effort to prevent anyone from having to choose between heating their home or feeding their family or paying for their medications. We hold a common belief that heat in one's home is a basic right, not a privilege, because it is essential for survival itself during the winter months. Lack of adequate heating and unsafe heating methods take the lives of countless residents of this community every year.

Jackson County Fuel Committee volunteers have, through their efforts, been able to save statistically at least six lives each heating season due to the advocacy and firewood distributions done by our volunteers.

Our delegation is here tonight to call on the Ashland City Council members to fulfill their duty and responsibility to use your jurisdictional power and pass a resolution that benefits the economic and thereby the physical health of working people in the community and the small businesses that serve them.

At a time when the costs of natural gas, heating oil, and electricity have been escalating, ratepayers, especially those who are least able to meet their own basic survival needs, are being forced to go without food, without medical care, without heat or electricity.

This past year the cost of energy in all forms – gasoline, heating oil, natural gas, propane and electricity – has escalated to record levels. The high cost of fuel, in turn, drives the cost of everyday survival needs including food, clothing, transportation, and medical care to new highs. This is already forcing the vast majority of low-income families to go without these basics, to be forced into overcrowded and unhealthy conditions if they can manage to keep even one room heated. Despite taking a second or third job – often part-time – many people still cannot afford the current costs of utilities.

The per capita income for the city of Ashland is \$21,292. 19.6 % of the population and 13.5% of families are below the poverty line. Out of a total population, 22% of those under the age of 18 and 8.5% of those 65 and older are living below the poverty line. 11.7% of the households in Ashland have a single female head of household.

Nearly half of Oregon renters pay more than a third of their income for housing, the third highest percentage in the nation.

According to federal data collected in 2002, families in the northwest spend 6 percent of their income on heating costs. However, low-income families generally pay out 10 to 30 % of their household budget to stay warm.

More than 70,000 Oregon households live with incomes at or below 50% of the federal poverty level, and face a home energy cost equaling 36% of their income or more. According to a recent study, just to keep a family of four warm and secure in their home, the average expense for utilities was \$2,350 a year in 2004, and that was before the current rise in fuel and utility costs.

In 2004, over 12% of the energy assistance recipients went without food to pay their home-heating bill. More than one-in-five are forced to go without medical care to pay for their heating bill. Almost 30% of them did not pay other household bills because they had no money for them.

While some low-income households incur debt in order to pay both their home heating bills and other basic necessities, others who cannot keep up incur utility shutoffs.

The Oregon Housing and Community Service agency reported in the 2005 heating season that over 15,000 households were put on waiting lists for energy assistance, but according to one Community Action Director, most of them received no help from State, Federal or private assistance programs because their agencies' funds were cut. The vast majority of these people either had a shutoff notice or were already disconnected from their utility service

Oregon's economy has shifted toward lower-wage jobs, according to a study last year by the Oregon Employment Department. At least half the jobs lost during the recent recession were in high-wage industries, such as manufacturing. Since the recession, most of the new jobs have emerged in low-wage industries, such as service and temporary employment agencies.

Presently little recourse exists for someone who cannot afford out-of-reach utility costs. There is no moratorium on shutoffs for the low-income in the state of Oregon based on financial eligibility alone, at any time of year – including winter. **Low-income households are being denied any alternative to utility shutoffs.**

We hereby petition the Ashland City Council to implement and enforce a “Winter Moratorium” from November 1st through March 31st of each year. The moratorium will prohibit the City of Ashland Utility Department from terminating, disconnecting or shutting off the electricity of any individual or household whose income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. In addition the moratorium will include a provision that any customer terminated prior to, or after the Winter Moratorium due to economic inability, would be granted a waiver of any and all reconnection fees for those ratepayers at or below 200% the poverty line.

I will now read the formal resolution into the record of this meeting.

Thank you.

**JACKSON COUNTY FUEL COMMITTEE RESOLUTION SUBMITTED
FOR ADOPTION BY ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL FEBRUARY 21, 2006:**

Whereas at a time when the cost of living, including the costs of electricity have been escalating, ratepayers, especially those who are least able to meet their basic survival needs, are many times being forced to go without food, medical care, heat or electricity just to avoid eviction or utility shut off,

Whereas presently little recourse exists for Ashland residents who cannot afford out-of-reach utility costs. During the winter, the Ashland Utility Department offers low-income, elderly and disabled households no alternative to utility shutoffs if they are unable to pay their bill in full. City and state energy assistance programs have proven inadequate to meet the totality of need that exists for low-income and disabled residents,

Whereas Ashland City Council members have as their duty and responsibility to make and implement policies that benefit the economic and thereby the physical health of working people in the community and small businesses they serve,

We, the residents and citizens of the City of Ashland and Jackson County, hereby petition the **Ashland City Council** to implement and enforce a “Winter Moratorium” from November 1st through March 31st of each year. The Winter Moratorium will prohibit the City of Ashland Utility Department from terminating, disconnecting or shutting off the electricity of any individual or household whose income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. In addition, the Winter Moratorium will include a provision that customers terminated prior to or after the Winter Moratorium period would be granted a waiver of any and all reconnection fees for those ratepayers whose income fall at or below 200% of federal the poverty level.