

[By Nicole Gaudiano](#)

Vermont's congressional delegation pledged to renew the fight for low-income heating aid following release of President Barack Obama's fiscal 2013 budget proposal on Monday.

The spending plan would provide \$3 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which helps families offset some of their heating and cooling costs.

The request is \$450 million more than Obama requested last year, but Vermont lawmakers say it isn't enough. Congress approved nearly \$3.5 billion for the program in the current fiscal year.

"For thousands of hard-pressed families in Vermont, LIHEAP is not a luxury but a survival tool," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said he plans to push for \$5.1 billion, the same amount he sought for this year.

"I don't want to see people in Vermont or this country go cold in the wintertime," Sanders said. "I think \$5.1 (billion) is a reasonable sum. We have not achieved it this year but I will continue to fight to make sure that LIHEAP is fully funded."

The LIHEAP program last received \$5.1 billion in fiscal 2010. The amount dropped to \$4.7 billion in fiscal 2011 and \$3.47 billion in fiscal 2012, which ends Sept. 30.

The cost of natural gas, the most common heating fuel for LIHEAP recipients, has not risen in recent years, but the price of heating oil has been rising, according to the budget. It says Obama requested more than he did last year because of expected increases in winter fuel costs.

Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., said he strongly disagrees with the LIHEAP proposal and will work to "turn this bad decision around."

"With the price of home heating fuel on the rise and many Vermonters struggling in this tough economy, this is clearly not the time to cut this critical lifeline," he said.

Overall, the president proposes spending \$3.8 trillion in the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1 and reducing deficits by \$4 trillion over 10 years. The deficit would top \$1 trillion in the current fiscal year for the fourth straight year and would fall to \$901 billion in fiscal 2013. Obama would raise taxes on the wealthy and eliminate some corporate tax breaks.

His budget proposes a \$476 billion transportation and infrastructure plan but does not call for major cuts to mandatory benefit programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. Growth in defense spending would slow, saving about \$487 billion over 10 years.

Obama's plan, which stands almost no chance of passing in a divided Congress, would produce \$1.5 trillion in new revenue, mostly by letting the Bush-era tax cuts expire for individuals making more than \$200,000 a year and families making more than \$250,000. Tax cuts for the middle class would be extended. Obama also wants to impose a minimum 30 percent tax rate on households making more than \$1 million a year. Republicans plan to offer their own budget next month.