Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Room H232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John A. Boehner, Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Room 1011, Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, D. C. 20515

The Honorable David R. Obey, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Room H218, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Room 1016, Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Boehner, Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

Thank you for your efforts to provide increased funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) this year. In addition to pursuing funds through the second stimulus supplemental, we urge you to include $5.1 billion for LIHEAP in any Continuing Resolution that may be considered.

The explosion in home energy costs requires immediate action to provide emergency funding as quickly as possible to help citizens across the nation cope with the record shut offs and arrears lingering from last winter and this summer and to prepare for the cold winter ahead. The need for additional LIHEAP money is without question. In both warm weather states and cold weather states, full LIHEAP funding will help avert deadly crises. Record-high temperatures have resulted in several deaths in California, Texas, and Oklahoma this summer. In Dallas, temperatures exceeded 100 degrees for nearly two weeks straight. And let us not forget the hardship many of these same families are dealing with following the recent hurricane.

In cold weather states, energy officials are concerned that high heating prices will create a humanitarian crisis as millions of families go cold because they can't afford to pay their utility bill. With heating oil prices projected to exceed $4.60 per-gallon, the cost to heat a home could be as much as $4,000 this winter. To deal with high prices, many families resort to unsafe heating methods, forgo lifesaving prescription medicine, or skip meals.

In both warm weather states and cold weather states, utility shutoffs have increased due to the struggling economy and record-high energy costs. In Arizona, the amount of households behind on their bills is up 36 percent from last year, and the number of disconnections in Phoenix alone has increased by 11,000 families from last year. In Pennsylvania, more than 650,000 households are in arrears, up from less than 500,000 last year. The National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA) estimates that more than 15.6 million households could face utility shutoffs because they can not pay their energy bill.

One answer to this problem is increased funding for LIHEAP. At the current funding level, LIHEAP serves only 15 percent of eligible families. With costs expected to be much higher in the coming year, far fewer families will be served if additional funds are not provided. $5.1 billion will double the Fiscal Year 2008 appropriation for LIHEAP and extend this vital lifeline to more low-income families and seniors.

Another action that Congress should take is increasing funding for the Weatherization Assistance Program. This money can be spent in advance of the coming winter and make energy bills lower not only this year, but for years to come. According to the National Association for State Community Services Programs, first year energy savings for households weatherized in 2008 will be more than $413. Less burdened by record-high energy bills, these families will have more money to spend on other essentials. Furthermore, the efficiencies produced by weatherizing a home pay for themselves quickly by creating jobs, reducing overall energy consumption, and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Thanks to your leadership, the House has shown bipartisan support for LIHEAP and Weatherization, and we thank you both for your commitment to helping low-income families. We urge you to continue to do everything possible to ensure that emergency funds are provided for LIHEAP and Weatherization.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Rep. James L. Oberstar, Co-Chair
Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition
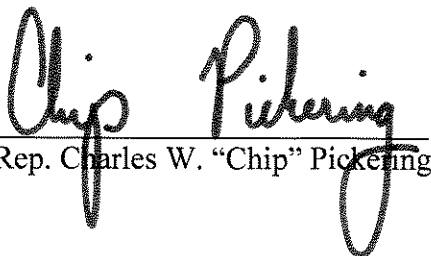
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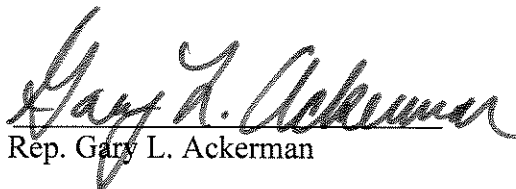
Rep. Edward J. Markey, Chair
Select Committee on
Energy Independence and Global Warming

Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, Chair
Subcommittee on Healthy Families and
Communities

Rep. Charles W. "Chip" Pickering
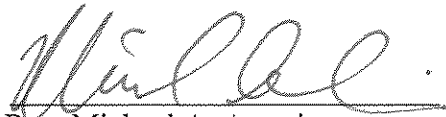
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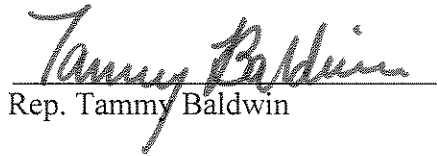
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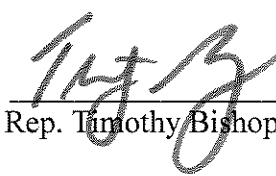
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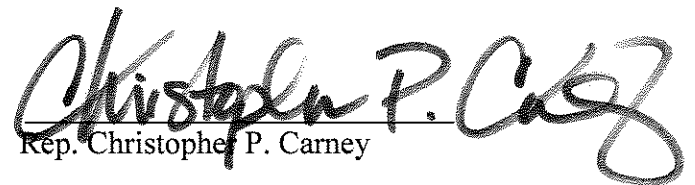
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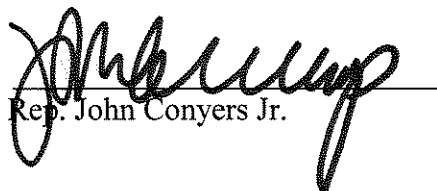
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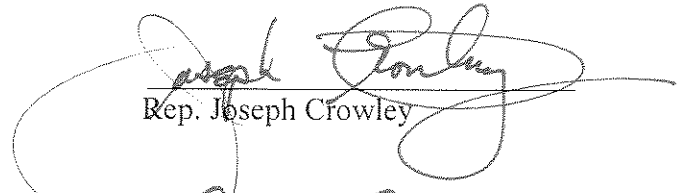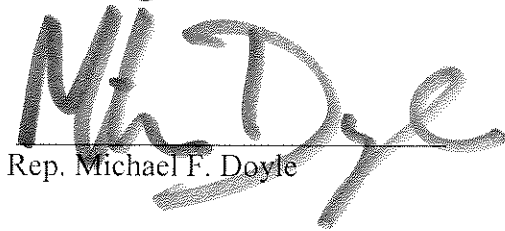Rep. Michael N. Castle

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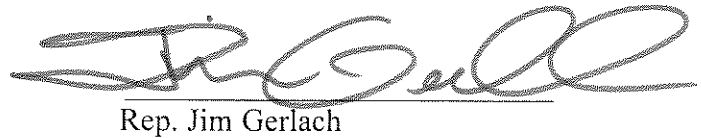Rep. Joseph Crowley

Rep. Danny K. Davis

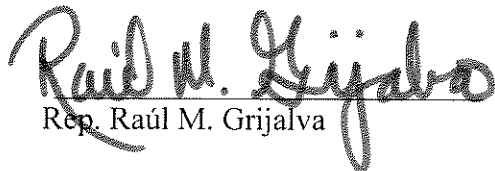Rep. Diana DeGette

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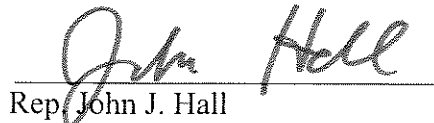
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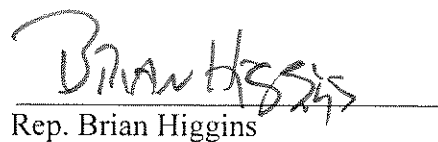
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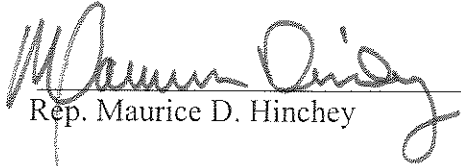
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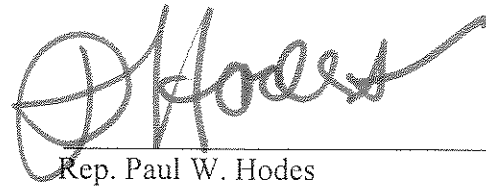
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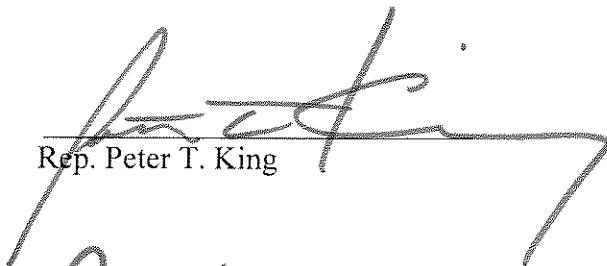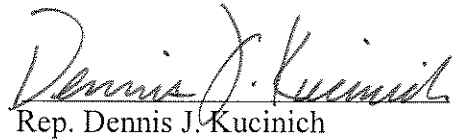
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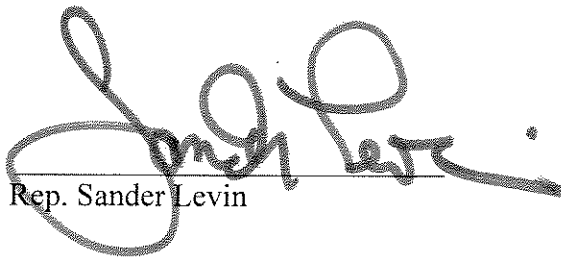
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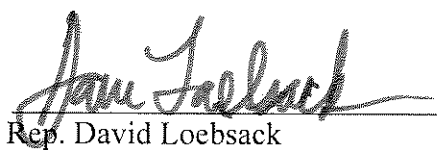
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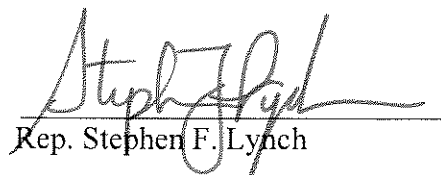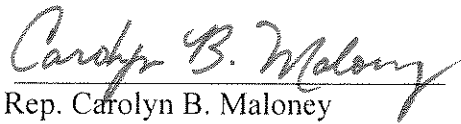
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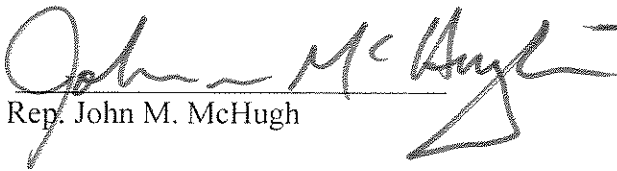
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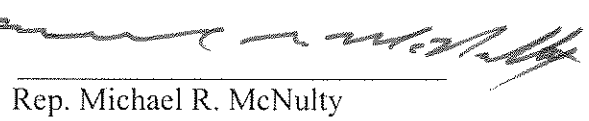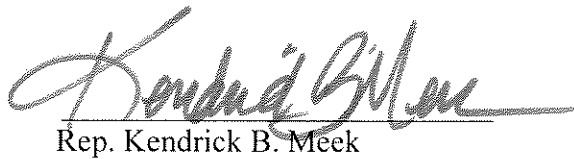
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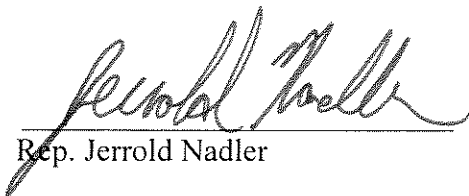
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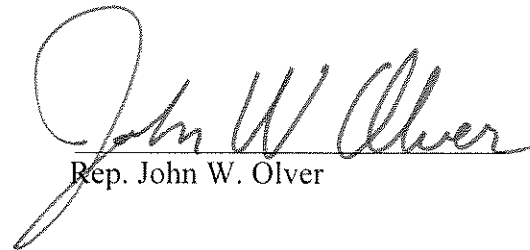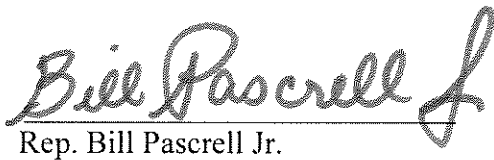
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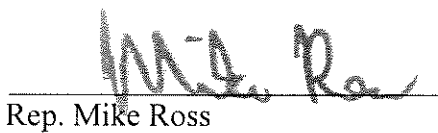
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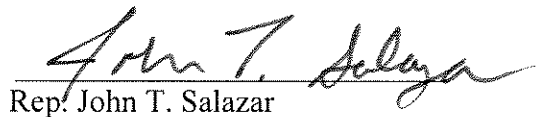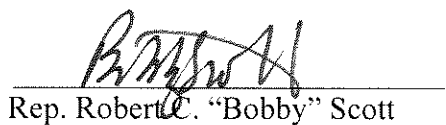
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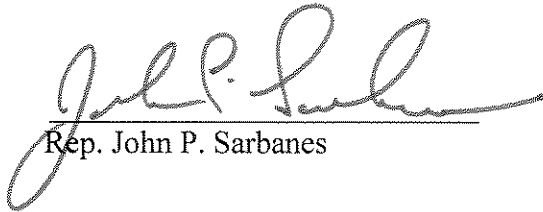
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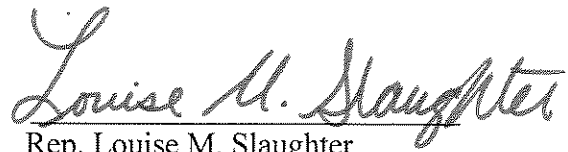Rep. Christopher S. Murphy
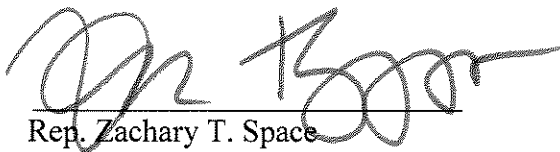
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