

February 5, 2003

The Honorable Dennis Hastert
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

As you undertake the conference on the FY 2003 omnibus appropriations bill, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) would like to express our support for two programs that have particular importance for the Northeast states: Amtrak and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). While the Governors recognize the financial constraints confronting Congress, we urge you to provide \$1.2 billion for Amtrak and at least \$1.8 billion for the LIHEAP program in the final omnibus bill.

The Governors urge you to retain the Senate language appropriating \$1.2 billion for intercity passenger rail in FY 2003. This level of federal funding is essential to the short-term stability that Amtrak needs in order to provide safe, reliable intercity and commuter passenger rail service while the current policy debate over the future of intercity passenger rail unfolds. States across the nation already provide substantial financial support for the current intercity passenger rail system. The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states have invested over \$4 billion in infrastructure and operations in the last ten years. Even with this substantial state support – and even with reform of the current intercity passenger rail system – the federal government must be a strong, consistent funding partner for intercity passenger rail, just as it is for the other modes of transportation that promote the efficient movement of people and goods.

The Governors also urge you to provide \$1.7 billion plus all remaining contingency funds for LIHEAP in the FY 2003 appropriations bill. We applaud the recent release of \$200 million of the \$300 million contingency funds made available through the FY 2001 Supplemental Appropriations Act. By including the remaining \$100 million unreleased contingency funds in the FY 2003 regular appropriation, these funds can be readily available to assist our states in taking steps to make home energy more affordable to the region's most vulnerable citizens – the elderly and disabled on fixed incomes, and families with young children. In the Northeast and across the nation, the combination of an early onset of winter weather; a prolonged period of harsh, freezing temperatures; rising home heating prices, and a weaker economy have contributed to a greater number of low-income households seeking assistance to pay their home heating bills. Confronted with this high demand for limited available LIHEAP funds and pressures on state budgets, states face the prospect of having few resources to assist households struggling to pay home energy bills – with additional months of winter weather ahead.

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The Governors thank the conferees for their past support of these programs, and urge you to provide \$1.2 billion for Amtrak and at least \$1.8 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program in the final FY2003 omnibus appropriations bill. We stand ready to provide any additional information on the importance of intercity passenger rail and LIHEAP to the Northeast and the nation.

Regards,

/os/
Mitt Romney
Chairman

/os/
George E. Pataki
Lead Governor for Transportation

Identical letters were sent to the Leadership and Conferees.