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Governor's Column: Kansas and Energy: Preparing for a New Era

The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:

It had been a warm and sunny fall in Kansas until recently. But temperatures in the 80's have already given way to the freezing winter months that lie before us. Our December winds will bring heating bills that will almost certainly hit historic highs. Nor are natural gas prices likely to return to the lower levels of the past few years.

The federal government has not prepared our nation or our economy well for higher energy prices, and the possibilities for state responses are limited. But here in Kansas, we can make changes that will increase our efficiencies as energy consumers and enable us to produce more energy, in both traditional and innovative ways.

There are steps we can take right away, for this winter, and other strategies and plans that will yield results for the future.

In the next few months we will provide at least 10,000 winterization kits to low-income families, which will offer greater comfort and may help reduce heating costs. Information about these kits, which will be distributed by local organizations, can be found at:

<http://www.kcc.state.ks.us/energy/kswarmhomes.htm>.

And of course, we can all reduce our heating costs by taking many commonsense steps to winterize our homes and turning down our thermostats. Some of these tips are available at www.warmhelp.org.

Over the next year, the Kansas Weatherization Program, which already retrofits more than 1,000 family homes each year, will also provide attic insulation to another 600-700 Kansas families. This will lead to real savings in energy costs.

For the long term, I am working closely with the Kansas Energy Council on various conservation and efficiency initiatives. Most notable, perhaps, is a state-backed, revolving state loan program, which will help many more Kansans weatherize their homes and reduce their heating costs.

These initiatives are just a start, however, in moving Kansas into a new era of energy conservation and production, with a growing emphasis on ethanol, efficiency, and wind power. The Energy Council, made up of industry experts, consumer representatives and state agency participation, is well on its way to providing Kansas with a practical strategy for affordable, reliable energy.

Every state must address its own mix of energy production and consumption issues, and there is no time to waste. I look forward to cooperating with the legislators, communities, and

utilities across the state to arrive at the best possible solutions to our present and future energy needs.

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