

King wants state to regulate heating oil

Frank Farry calls it a ploy by the state representative. He says a state House leadership slush fund of \$100 million could provide instant relief.

By **BRIAN SCHEID**
STAFF WRITER

State Rep. Chris King, D-142, wants the state to regulate the heating oil industry, a move he believes will help homeowners suffering from skyrocketing heating bills.

Frank Farry, King's Republican opponent in this year's House race, accused King of pulling "an election year ploy" that would do nothing to lower home heating oil bills this winter.

This week, King announced his plans to introduce legislation that would call on the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission to regulate the heating oil industry, the same way the commission monitors the natural gas, artificial gas and electric industries under state law.

On Friday, King said he wants the utility commission to provide oversight to protect consumers from pricing structures, he said, which often seem to rise with "no rhyme or reason."

King said more than 25 percent of Pennsylvania homes are heated by oil.

Giving the commission regulatory oversight of the heating oil industry would "ensure that consumers are not being taken advantage of," King said.

King said he is trying to line up cosponsors for the legislation, which he said he planned to introduce before the Legislature returned to Harrisburg next month. King said it was possible that the bill could be voted on before the end of the legislative session.

However, Farry said King was aware months ago that heating oil prices would be a problem this winter and should have introduced this bill in the spring. Farry said by the time the Legislature would even be able to act on King's bill, homeowners would already be struggling with heating oil bills.

"This should have been done in the spring," said Farry.

Heating oil prices are expected to rise in the Northeast this winter to \$4.35 a gallon, a more than 30 percent increase from last winter when prices averaged \$3.31 a gallon, according to a recent forecast from the Energy Information Administration. Two years ago, heating oil averaged \$2.51 a gallon.

On Friday, Farry detailed a heating oil plan of his own to take \$100 million out of the state leadership account and increase the number of seniors and families in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and increase the amount of financial assistance they receive.

Farry said under the program's guidelines a family of four with an annual income of \$33,000 would not be eligible for energy assistance.

King represents Hulmeville, Langhorne, Langhorne Manor, Penndel, all but two precincts in Lower Southampton and most of Middletown.

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Farry



King