



# ADVOCATE POWER

LIHEAP Update

## Efforts to Cut U.S. Spending Are Heating Up Impact on Poor Americans Likely to be Significant

Both the president and House Republicans have now outlined their proposals to trim federal deficits. Their plans span a decade or more and far-eclipse the annual budget and appropriation process that normally occupies the debate in Washington, D.C. Because the outlines of these plans are so vast, they do not yet fully describe the effects on specific programs that are critically important to at-risk Americans and *Advocate Power* readers alike.

While programs like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), Head Start and Energy Efficiency (EE) are not mentioned, they will almost certainly be affected by these discussions in the months and years ahead. In the interim it is already clear that LIHEAP, WAP, CSBG, Head Start and EE are all facing the possibility of dramatic reductions in the FY2012 appropriation process—and each requires an aggressive defense at home and in Congress beginning right now.

America's deficit is the difference between what it spends, and what it takes in. Unless existing laws are changed the federal deficit is expected to increase by \$7 trillion over the next 10 years.

Both the president and House Republicans envision cutting government operations.

The president would cut deficits by \$4 trillion over 12 years, with \$3 trillion through spending reductions and \$1 trillion from revenue. The president relies upon an automatic trigger to force cuts if deficits don't stabilize by 2014. House Republicans would cut \$5.8 trillion over 10 years. These sweeping changes affect key pillars of our government:

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"Most of us have been blessed with the ability to provide for our families, enjoy the fruits of our labor and not have to struggle daily to survive. *The Pathways from Poverty* workshop shows us just what it's like to be poor in America today, and how much our efforts help."

—Mike Rodgers,  
Communications Specialist, Entergy Texas, Inc.  
See Related Story, page 3.



The Weatherization Assistance Program is under threat of elimination in FY2012.

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# Entergy Helps Low-Income Customers Receive \$6.1 Million in Tax Returns

## Earned Income Tax Credit Helps Working Poor Keep More of What They Earn

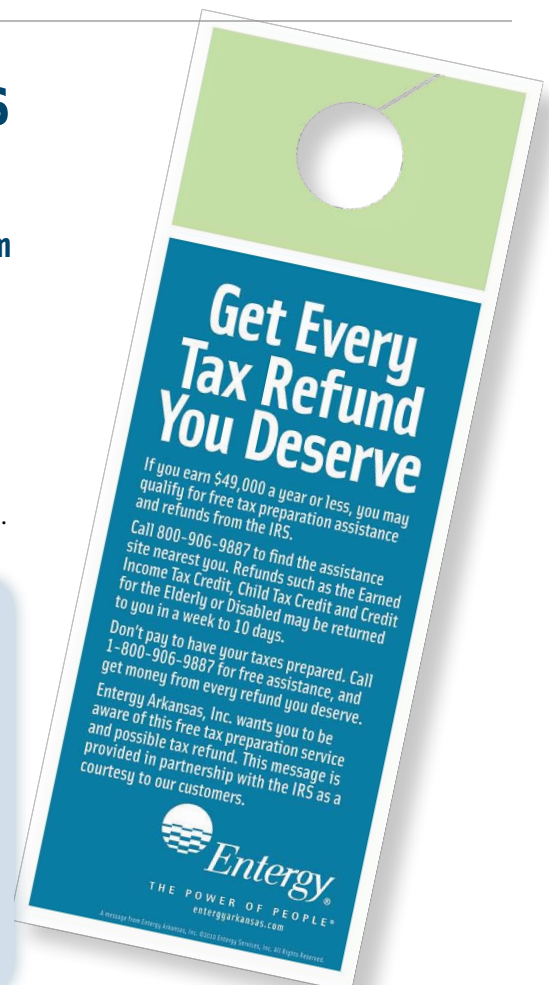
The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one of the best anti-poverty tools available today, but many low-income Americans don't file for it simply because they don't know they can! Entergy worked throughout the first quarter of this year to raise awareness of EITC and encourage eligible taxpayers to file for it.

From January through April, Entergy employees distributed informational door hangers, and placed more than 280,000 outreach telephone calls to residential customers throughout the areas the company serves. As a result of the efforts with our community, state, and federal partners, 9,640 returns were filed and more than \$12.9 million refunded to working customers.

Typical partnership activities included sponsorship of volunteer return preparation in

SERVICE AREA	RETURNS FILED	EITC REFUNDS
Arkansas	717	\$831,438
Mississippi	1,300	\$2,664,804
Louisiana	4,237	\$4,330,373
New Orleans	2,125	\$4,057,407
Texas	1,261	\$1,098,100
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9,640</b>	<b>\$12,982,122</b>

Louisiana and across the Entergy System, media outreach in Mississippi, pairing EITC information with energy management promotion in New Orleans and an aggressive rural outreach in Texas and Arkansas.



These door hangers were placed at homes in Entergy Arkansas' service area to educate taxpayers about the Earned Income Tax Credit and encourage them to file for it on their 2010 return.

## Map the Meal Gap Gives Portrait of Hunger in the U.S.



You've heard it before – the richest nation in the world has men, women, children and elderly citizens without food. Hunger exists in every state across the country, according to Feeding America, a nonprofit whose mission is to feed America's hungry through a nationwide network of member food banks and engage our country in the fight to end hunger.

But, as the organization's newest hunger tool demonstrates, hunger looks different from county to county as well as from one congressional district to the next.

Map the Meal Gap is a compilation of research for advocates to evaluate the real state of hunger in their communities. The project's estimates are based on unemployment rates, median incomes, poverty rates and other demographic measures. According to Feeding America, understanding a community's population can help its leaders identify strategies for reaching the people who most need food assistance.

The hunger study notes: national food insecurity data reveal about 45 percent of those struggling with hunger actually have incomes above the federal poverty level, and 53 percent of poor households are food secure. Measuring need based on local poverty rates alone provides an incomplete illustration of the potential need for food assistance within our communities. Most importantly, better community-level data can serve as an important resource for engaging community leaders and partners in the journey from aspiration (ending hunger) to achievement through a quantifiable and data-driven approach.

Map the Meal Gap provides the rate of food insecurity by percent of population, the average cost of a meal in that area, the amount of additional funds it would require to meet food needs, and the number of food insecure people in that community. You can discover how your community ranks by accessing [FeedingAmerica.org](http://FeedingAmerica.org), choosing Hunger Studies and selecting Map the Meal Gap.



# A Lesson in Poverty—The Tyranny of the Moment

*Mike Rodgers is a communications specialist with Entergy Texas, Inc. He was invited to participate in this simulation and write about it from a first-person perspective.*

Within a few minutes my family had been robbed, our electricity cut off, we had been evicted from our home, and I was threatened with the loss of my job.

Fortunately, this did not happen in real life. It was part of a workshop aimed at giving those of us who have never been poor a glimpse of what many of Entergy's customers in Texas go through every day, often for years on end.

Most of us have been blessed with the ability to provide for our families, enjoy the fruits of our labor and not have to struggle daily to survive. For those who do, life can be much more challenging than we imagine.



Pam Williams (L) and Danielle Scheiner staff the grocery store where participants in the Pathways from Poverty simulation workshop were allowed to purchase food.

That's one of the lessons I took away from the Pathways from Poverty workshop, sponsored by the Entergy Texas low-income advocates and the Entergy Texas Diversity and Inclusion Council. Entergy New Orleans first launched this program in 2010, and since then it has been offered to employees in all states as well as to low-income customer advocates in Louisiana and Arkansas. More community workshops are scheduled this year in all of the states Entergy serves.

Each of us was given a role to play. In my case, I was a 36-year-old man with an unemployed wife, a 15-year-old daughter and an ailing mother-in-law. On paper, we should have been able to meet our financial obligations. The reality was far different.

The fictional family received public assistance to help pay bills. As the head of the family, I felt it was my responsibility to go to work, bring home the paycheck and see to it that all our needs were met.

Unfortunately, I did not take into account the time it would take to pay the mortgage and utility bills, buy food, work with the public assistance bureaucracy and take care of the numerous other needs of my family.

We quickly became overwhelmed by circumstances and our family fell apart. Our teenage daughter was virtually ignored and used school as her escape from life's uncomfortable reality.

Time management became a critical skill. The quick-pay center where we cashed our checks often ran out of money and was closed on the weekends, leaving us with uncashed checks and unmet obligations.

At a debriefing following the simulation, we admitted feeling helpless, hopeless, angry, frustrated, depressed and much disrespected for our plight. We lived in the tyranny of the moment.

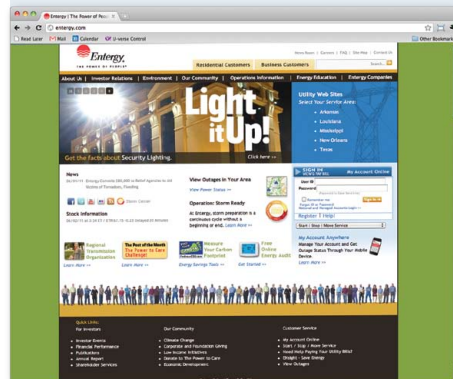
Some Entergy employees see poverty every day. For those of us who do not, this was an eye-opening exercise. We often hear or even say, "These people are lazy," or "Get a job." Walk a mile in the shoes of others, and you will perceive these comments in a different light.

Everything we experienced in the space of an hour, in all the various scenarios, is experienced by real people in the real world. I personally found it an emotionally exhausting 60 minutes, and I am more grateful than ever for the blessings I have received. Entergy's effort to help our low-income customers is an important outreach and should be a source of pride for all of us.

Pathways from Poverty workshops will be available for other Entergy employees and for the general public later in the year. I hope you will take the opportunity to find out what it is really like to live on the poor side of town.

## Entergy Offers Payment Plans to Help Manage Energy Use, Bills

There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all billing system or energy management program that will work for every customer. But, regardless of income, everyone can learn to be energy



efficient and manage their energy bills so they can save both energy and money. Entergy can help customers do both with a variety of payment, billing and management options.

When it comes to bill payment assistance, you can find the right solution on Entergy's website under "My Home." Everything from choosing a billing option like Level Billing and Equal Pay to getting help in paying a utility bill through The Power to Care is listed. Customers also can take a free online energy audit to see where the bulk of their energy is used and discover how to reduce or eliminate energy use.

To learn more about ways to help better manage energy use, please access Entergy's website, select your state utility and click on Energy Efficiency information links.



## Entergy Named One of Top 100 Corporate Citizens in 2011



For the fourth time in five years, Entergy is honored to be listed as one of the top 100 corporate citizens by *Corporate Responsibility (CR) Magazine*. *CR Magazine* announced its annual list in March, and the complete list can be accessed at [thecro.com](http://thecro.com).

According to the publication, the 100 Best Corporate Citizens Database is based completely on publicly-available data sources and computed by IW Financial, a Portland, Maine-based financial analysis firm serving the environment and social governance investment community. Data is collected in seven categories, on which each of the corporations' rankings is based:

- Climate change
- Employee relations
- Environment
- Financial
- Governance
- Human rights
- Philanthropy

*"To be consistently ranked with companies like 3M, Coca-Cola and Nike as thoughtful, solid corporate citizens is a great compliment to everyone at Entergy*

*who makes sure we provide our customers with the best service possible," said Patty Riddlebarger, director of corporate social responsibility for Entergy. "I'm thrilled Entergy was honored with this distinction,*

*and I look forward to working to make sure we are listed again in 2012."*



## Efforts to Cut U.S. Spending are Heating Up

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### Medicare/Medicaid

Both the president's and House Republican's approaches target health care programs for the elderly, poor and disabled. Both would cut \$500 billion over 10 years from projected increases in Medicare.

The president would leave Medicare and Medicaid basically in their current forms, but cut at least \$200 billion from Medicare and \$100 billion from Medicaid over 10 years. He relies upon an independent advisory board to trim Medicare spending growth, and would negotiate lower prescription costs, improve safety and limit payments for medical devices.

Republicans would repeal last year's health care overhaul and largely recast Medicare and Medicaid, while cutting Medicare spending by an additional \$30 billion. Americans who are now 54 and younger would get a voucher to purchase coverage from private plans instead of the government paying health care providers. Medicaid would be cut by \$771 billion over 10 years. Poor people would get federal money from states through a block grant.

### Social Security

While neither the president nor House Republicans would change Social Security, Republicans have established procedures that make future reductions more likely.

### Taxes

President Obama proposes a tax overhaul to eliminate tax breaks and loopholes and to lower some rates, resulting in \$1 trillion of additional revenue. He also wants to allow the Bush tax cuts to expire for individuals and couples making \$200,000 or \$250,000 or more a year, respectively. House Republicans would scrap tax breaks and loopholes in exchange for reducing the top income tax rate for both individuals and corporations, and would extend the Bush tax breaks for all income levels.

### Prognosis

As demonstrated by the recent debate about federal funding for the current fiscal year (FY2011), which relied upon a series of short-term, stop-gap funding extensions, and even the 11th-hour threat of a government shut-down, these issues are contentious and hard-fought. It seems clear that the debate about funding for FY2012, which is now beginning in earnest, and our need to raise America's debt ceiling will be even more spirited.

### Advocacy is Not a Spectator Sport

All of this bears close watching and your active participation. The specifics of the FY2012 appropriations process for LIHEAP, Weatherization, CSBG, Head Start and Energy Efficiency will immediately affect low- and moderate-income Americans. FY2012 funding levels will be determined by Congress between now and September (FY2012 begins Oct. 1).

If you share our concerns about proposed cuts to these life-saving programs, home-grown grassroots efforts are springing up to inform our representatives in Congress to the problems of concentrating budget cuts on the backs of the elderly, disabled and working poor. These proposals are only proposals, but if they are a concern to you, your family, friends and neighbors, then we urge everyone to get—and stay—involved.

Take action now—go to: [SupportLIHEAP.org](http://SupportLIHEAP.org).

With the help of Entergy's Washington Office, we will keep you apprised.

