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**TEAM MARYLAND FIGHTS FOR MARYLAND BUSINESSES,
NON-PROFITS AND FAMILIES COPING WITH
HIGH GAS PRICES**

BALTIMORE -- U.S. Senators Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD) and Barbara A. Mikulski today joined with U.S. Congressmen Elijah Cummings (D-7th) and John Sarbanes (D-3rd) in hearing from members of Maryland's small business and non-profit communities about the problems they face because of rising gas prices. The Senators and Congressmen pledged to take their message back to Congress and continue their work to overcome partisan obstacles in solving our energy crisis.

On Thursday, Senators Cardin and Mikulski introduced the *Fair Deal for Volunteers Act* to provide immediate relief for volunteers who use their own cars for charitable purposes. It would remove the current 14-cent deduction per mile limit for tax-payers who use their own cars to assist charitable organizations such as Meals on Wheels. By removing the limit, charitable volunteers would be treated the same as other groups whose mileage deductions are adjusted regularly by the IRS. Currently, people who have to drive because of a job-related move or to medical appointments can deduct 27-cents per mile.

Senators Cardin and Mikulski also have co-sponsored the *Consumer-First Energy Act, S. 3044*, which has been blocked from consideration in the Senate. This bill addresses the root causes of high gas prices by holding the big oil companies, speculators, and OPEC accountable. It would repeal \$27 billion in unnecessary tax breaks for oil and gas companies and use the money for renewable-energy development and energy-efficiency technology. It would give the President authority to declare an energy emergency, making "an unconscionably excessive price" for fuel products illegal and punishable with fines of up to \$5 million. And, it would impose a tax on "windfall profits" of the major oil companies unless they invest in alternative, renewable energy sources.

The Senators also have co-sponsored the *Prevent Unfair Manipulations of Prices (PUMP) Act*, which would address loopholes that allow energy futures traders to evade federal oversight and artificially elevate oil prices and the prices Americans face at the pump. Many industry experts agree that passing the *PUMP Act* would limit excessive speculation in the commodity market, bringing oil prices to as low as \$60 a barrel.

"Small businesses and non-profits in Maryland and across the country are hurting, and Congress has a responsibility to act swiftly to tackle the skyrocketing gas prices," said **Senator Cardin**, a

member of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee. “Today, 62% of small business owners use a vehicle in their business and many are facing serious financial problems because of high gas prices. At the same time, we are seeing a decline in services by the non-profit community because they cannot afford the price of gas. In the short-term, we need to provide immediate relief to Americans. In the long-term, we need new policies that will make us energy secure and end our nation’s dependence on foreign oil.”

“Americans are feeling stretched and strained as they face rising fuel costs and food prices. I believe Congress must act now to provide relief to the families and businesses who are struggling to make ends meet. We need to put government back on the side of the people,” said **Senator Mikulski**. “I know that Marylanders are frustrated, and I take those frustrations with me to the Capitol as I fight to go after the speculators and gas gougers who are manipulating our economy and for federal investments in alternative fuels that will bring costs down.”

In Central Maryland, in one year Meals on Wheels (MOW) has experienced a 20% increase in gas costs. In May 2007, they paid \$6,643.37 for gas; in May 2008 that figure had jumped to \$8,555.06. In FY 2007, MOW paid \$72,538.70 to fill up its vans; in FY2008 the average cost has risen to \$86,790.63. Nationally, nearly 60% of the estimated 5,000 Meals on Wheels programs have lost volunteers who cannot afford gas. Additionally, nearly half the programs have eliminated routes or consolidated meal services and 30% are cutting personal visits from five days a week to one.

The majority of small business owners drive more than 50 miles a day in their automobiles to operate their businesses. Small businesses don't have the same availability of capital in order to buy equipment or the same availability of capital in order to keep their businesses afloat. Many small business owners are mortgaging their homes in order to keep their businesses going. Many are using credit cards with the highest possible interest rates to keep afloat. Now they have additional energy costs.

When President Bush took office in 2001, a gallon of regular gas cost \$1.46. More than seven years later, prices have climbed to more than \$4 per gallon of regular gas and nearly \$5 per gallon of diesel fuel.

Additional participants in today’s press conference also included: A. Thomas Grazio, Executive Director of Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland; Lucy Davis, an independent cabdriver for Yellow and Checker Cab; and Todd Breighner, small business and entrepreneur consultant, Streamlined Solutions, Inc.

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