

electrical bill accounted for 61% of total expenditures, according to town administrator Helen Mitchell. In response, it has cut costs. The hours for city workers were cut to six hours from eight hours a day last year. The part-time patrolman position was eliminated a couple of years ago.

The result of these crushing bills is that remote villages face a slow decline. Four schools in the last two years have shut their doors when they fell below 10 students and lost most state funding. In Shungnak, school enrollment is off 7% in the past decade. A few miles down the Kobuk River, the village of Ambler has lost 29% of its school-aged population.

Despite shrinking enrollment, the regional school district has been on a building boom in recent years, largely supported by state grants. That, in turn, has only increased its need for fuel. The new schools, despite better insulation, require more petroleum to operate.

NEW SCHOOL

In nearby Noatak, an 18,000-square-foot school was torn down and replaced with one more than twice as large with a new air-circulating system and more lights.

"We have a very fragile economy in most of these villages already and then you add the jolt of high fuel-oil prices. It's my guess that many of these communities will not find themselves viable if fuel prices stay here," says Mike Black, director of community advocacy at Alaska's Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. The villages, he says, "are begging, borrowing and stealing to get enough fuel."

The extreme costs of fuel in rural Alaska have led to numerous energy experiments. But various efforts to reduce rural Alaska's dependence on petroleum-based energy have struggled. Petroleum is easy to store, handle and transport, says Brent Sheets, head of the federal government's Arctic Energy Office in Fairbanks. "It is hard to beat diesel fuel," he says.

A proposal to build a small nuclear power plant for one small town was shelved when a study concluded that the federal security requirements made the project uneconomic. Solar isn't a good fit for Alaska, because fuel demand goes up in the winter when the state gets little sunlight. The Energy Department office even looked at turbines designed to harness river energy, dodging logs and car-sized icebergs, but plans never made it past the theoretical stage.

One alternative-energy success story is in Kotzebue, the hub community to the west of Shungnak on the Chukchi Sea. On the tundra outside of Kotzebue, where the only sign of life is paw prints from an Arctic fox, are 17 windmills capable of generating one megawatt of electricity. The windmills "are a hedge against rising fuel costs," says Brad Reeve, a Minnesotan who came to the town 30 years ago to run the public-radio station and now heads up the electric cooperative.

As the cost of bringing in diesel has grown, electricity from the windmills has looked better and better. But the windmills have a high upfront cost—they sit on special pilings with chemicals that ensure the tundra remains frozen to hold the windmills steady. And on a recent morning, as a computer in the coop's offices showed 2.8 megawatts of demand, the wind wasn't blowing. All of the electricity came from distillate-burning generators, a reminder that Kotzebue needs to keep a steady supply of oil.

In Shungnak, Mr. Woods, the tribal-government official, says he expects the oil will keep on flowing. Eskimos are accustomed to adapting to extreme conditions, he says. But there is little effort being made to teach children how to hunt the old way. "Their lifestyle now is so convenient," he says.

Hanging out on the steps of the village store after school with friends, 11th-grader Dion Tickett says he didn't grow up learning how to hunt or take care of a team of Alaskan huskies. He grew up watching television and riding snowmobiles, something he and his friends do to pass the time. "There's nothing to do around here," he says.

After school let out on a recent afternoon, Mr. Woods spent \$90 to fill up his Arctic Cat snowmobile to take his son out hunting. But he doesn't expect his son to need these skills. In a couple of years, when his son enters high school, Mr. Woods plans to move his family to east Texas, where he was stationed in the military. Gasoline there costs just under \$3.00 a gallon.

LEWISTON'S RECOGNITION AS ONE OF TEN ALL-AMERICAN CITIES

HON. MICHAEL H. MICHAUD

OF MAINE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in celebration of the fact that Lewiston, Maine, has been recognized as 1 of 10 All-American Cities by the National Civic League.

Lewiston truly embodies both dynamic change and proud tradition and is extremely deserving of this award. Located in my congressional district in Maine, the city of Lewiston was first settled in 1770 by Franco-American and Acadian settlers, who came to Lewiston to find employment in the mills powered by the nearby Androscoggin River. Textile mills flourished as women from the surrounding countryside came for employment opportunities. The city continued to grow and expand, and by the 1950s, Lewiston had become the State's primary manufacturing center.

Unfortunately, the subsequent decline of textile manufacturing led to unemployment, decreased wages, and a need for new ideas and new industries. In the 1990s, the city began to focus on new downtown construction, bold development strategies, improved post-secondary educational prospects, expanded health care, and new cultural events. In 1992, the town acquired the Bates mill and redeveloped 500,000 square feet of space. Lewiston also joined in a partnership with Auburn, ME, for economic development, busing, 911 services and drinking water. In the downtown area, the Southern Gateway project established Maine's first fully-fiber optic community for telephone, cable and broadband services. University of Southern Maine has begun a new expansion which makes the Lewiston-Auburn College the fastest growing campus within the University of Maine system, while Bates College has been recognized as a best value college by a national publication.

Since 2003, Lewiston has invested \$20 million in affordable housing to provide opportunities for families, and since 2000, it has seen \$350 million in new business construction.

Today, Lewiston is thriving. It is home to almost 36,000 residents, and it is clear that her citizens are working together with great pride to continue building the community. Local institutions are deeply involved in helping Lewiston to grow and evolve. The Androscoggin Leadership Institute is helping the community to understand its current and future needs and find new opportunities for individuals to contribute. The local Thongragg Nature Center

Project is now the largest bird sanctuary within New England; volunteers there ensure safe access to 5 miles of recreational trails. And since the city is now home to a large Somali community, the group United Somali Women of Maine has created a DVD that stresses the importance of education, changing roles of women, and the commitment to preserving their culture for the youth of Lewiston.

It is clear that Lewiston today is a center of business, volunteerism, education, environmental action, and diversity. The citizens are mindful of their proud traditions, and have made something very special in Lewiston, ME. Their achievements are truly something to commemorate, and I congratulate the city of Lewiston for their achievements and for the well-deserved recognition of this award.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 15, 2007

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2642) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, and for other purposes:

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend the chairman of the Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee—Congressman EDWARDS, Chairman OBEY, and my colleagues for passing the Military Construction and Veterans Appropriations for FY 2008.

This bill is the largest increase in veterans funding in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration.

As a result, this measure supports high priority programs such as Homeless Veterans Care, Mental Health Care, and Long-Term Care.

As a former psychiatric nurse at the Dallas Veterans Administration Hospital, I know firsthand the disparities contributed by lack of funding.

I am particularly pleased to see the bill provides increased funding for homeless veterans programs, three centers for Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to become fully operational this year. It also matches the VA's request to fund programs for minority contractor procurement and streamlines the VA billing system.

The Dallas VA has been a leader in outreach to homeless veterans, who comprise almost a fourth of the homeless adults in the Nation.

The North Texas VA Health Care System in Dallas was the first to establish a comprehensive homeless program, which helps homeless veterans with mental and physical illnesses. Dallas is one of eight cities in the country with a veteran's homelessness program targeted towards women.