

## POLITIFACT

# Fact-check: Are energy costs highest in 15 years?

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**Morgan Luttrell:** "Energy costs are the highest in 15 years"**PolitiFact's ruling:** Mostly True**Here's why:** U.S. Rep. Morgan Luttrell, R-Texas, brought attention to energy costs in a recent tweet about broad energy indicators.

"Energy costs are the highest in 15 years," the newly elected Houston area congressman wrote Jan. 10.

We already fact-checked another claim he made in the tweet about the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve being at its lowest level in nearly 40 years that he included in that same tweet. We rated that True.

Now we're examining his second claim: are energy costs at a 15-year high?

## Luttrell's statistic pertains to winter heating costs

Luttrell's office pointed to a November CNN article about the Biden administration distributing \$4.5 billion to alleviate Americans' high energy bills through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The program distributes federal funding to states for home heating and cooling costs.

Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, told CNN the cost of home energy this winter is at its highest level in more than 15 years. The association's website says it represents state directors for the federal energy assistance program, and the association advocates for households needing LIHEAP assistance.

Wolfe told PolitiFact Texas the numbers used in the association's analysis are from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) winter fuels outlook. The EIA issues this annual outlook on fuels — natural gas, heating oil, electricity and propane — used during winter in U.S. homes for heating and other uses. Data is grouped by fuel type.

The EIA estimated in October the average household spending on natural gas would jump 28% compared to the previous winter. Heating oil, electricity and propane would jump 27%, 10% and 5% respectively.

While Luttrell referenced energy costs, Wolfe's statement pertains specifically to home heating costs.

EIA considers a wide variety of factors in its analysis. For example, natural gas prices increased because of a strong demand for exporting, according to the October outlook. And consumers generally bear the brunt of wholesale price changes in petroleum-based fuels, such as heating oil and propane.

“They do estimates by fuel type. They don’t do a national average. So, we do a weighted (average) based on the prices,” Wolfe said.

A November news release by the association said home heating costs will reach its highest level in more than 10 years. The association’s release was based on the October EIA estimates.

Wolfe said prices are volatile now but have been trending high.

“Not all fuels are at a 15-year high,” Wolfe said. “It depends on what you’re looking at. But the average is at a 15 year-high.”

## **A look at federal energy data**

EIA data calculates the average seasonal household expenditure nationally for natural gas, electricity and heating oil. (Propane — used by a small share of U.S. households as a primary heating fuel — is not included in the data). Households are grouped by their primary heating fuel. EIA provided historical expenditure data from winter 2007-2008 and onward to PolitiFact Texas.

The average U.S. household costs for electricity, heating oil and natural gas are forecast to be higher in the 2022-2023 winter compared to the one in 2007-2008, about 15 years ago. Prices, however, fluctuated within that time span.

The \$1,371 average cost for electricity in the updated February forecast exceeds the winter 2007-2008 level of \$939. The \$809 average cost for natural gas this winter exceeds the 2007-2008 level of \$743.

For heating oil, this winter’s average household cost is forecast at \$2,231, compared with \$1,617 in winter 2007-2008.

In the 2013-14 winter, however, the average \$2,122 cost for heating came close to the current forecast, data shows.

Average 2022-23 energy costs forecast for each fuel type are the highest in the past 15 years. Luttrell’s statistic checks out.

The average cost estimates the EIA provided for the 2022-23 winter are updated forecasts it made in February. Luttrell’s claim relied on forecasts made in October, which were even higher for natural gas and heating oil (and about the same for electricity). Luttrell’s statistic still holds true with the data available at that time.

Of note, EIA does not isolate heating costs from other energy usage expenses. So, for example, if a household’s primary heating fuel is electricity, and electricity also powers their appliances and lighting, then the heating expenditure for electricity is lumped in with the other electricity-related expenditures.

However, while the data can reflect some other household energy costs, EIA forecasts are made to understand household heating costs, not overall energy costs.

## Our ruling

Luttrell said, “Energy costs are the highest in 15 years.”

Luttrell’s statistic—which he pulled from an article citing the National Energy Assistance Directors Association—holds true with the data available and analyzed at the time.

EIA data provided to PolitiFact show that average household heating costs are higher now than they were 15 years ago, and these expenditures are higher than any other year during that time span.

Luttrell’s statistic, however, didn’t specify that his statistic pertained to predicted household heating costs, so the figure could have been understood to encompass other costs, such as gasoline or household energy costs.

We rate this Mostly True.

## Our Sources

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