

# *The 60 Plus Association*

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## Rising Energy Costs Harm Mississippi's Senior Citizens

### Overview

Energy, like food and housing, is an indispensable necessity of life. In Mississippi's hot climate, air conditioning is essential to the survival of many elderly and infirm citizens. Rising electricity and other energy prices are adversely impacting Mississippi's senior citizens today. Mississippi has 259,000 households aged 65 or more ("65+"), representing nearly one-quarter of total households.

Future energy cost increases, driven in large measure by petroleum supply and demand trends and by current and pending U.S. EPA regulations, are likely to outstrip real household incomes among the 73% of Mississippi's 65+ households with gross annual incomes less than \$50,000. EPA's newest proposal to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from existing power plants will further strain the budgets of low- and fixed-income seniors who are among the most vulnerable to electric rate and other energy price increases.

Key findings of this energy brief include:

- ✓ The average pre-tax household income of 65+ households in Mississippi was \$44,069 in 2012, 16% below the average Mississippi household income of \$52,677, and 38% below the national average gross household income.
- ✓ More than one-half of Mississippi's 65+ households had gross annual incomes below \$30,000 in 2012, with an average pre-tax household income of \$15,821, or \$1,318 per month.
- ✓ For Mississippi's 259,000 65+ households, electricity represents 74% of total residential energy bills.
- ✓ The price of electricity per kilowatt-hour (kWh) in Mississippi has increased by 47% since 2001, well above the 35% increase in inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index. This increase is due in part to higher fuel costs and the costs of compliance with EPA regulations. This has increased average annual electricity bills for 65+ households in Mississippi from \$1,314 in 2009 to an estimated \$1,402 in 2013.
- ✓ The modest Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) received by Mississippi's Social Security recipients, representing one-third of all Mississippi households in 2012, do not keep pace with inflation.
- ✓ U.S. DOE's projection for wellhead natural gas prices calls for a 3.7% annual real increase from 2012 to 2040. These price increases do not account for the increase in natural gas demand expected to result from EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan ("CPP") for reducing CO2 emissions from existing power plants.
- ✓ EPA's CPP will increase electric prices for Mississippi's 65+ households. The proposed rule sets forth "building blocks" of options for reducing emissions in Mississippi, focused on decreasing the use of coal in favor of natural gas, while increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy resources.
- ✓ EPA's Regulatory Impact Analysis ("RIA") for the CPP projects national costs of \$5.4 to \$7.4 billion annually in 2020. EPA's projections assume billions of dollars of annual savings from reductions of electric demand through widespread investments in energy efficiency measures.
- ✓ **EPA's proposed "building blocks" for state emission reductions contain unrealistic assumptions on the potential for large-scale renewable energy and energy efficiency development within the short timetable of the EPA rule, and untenable projections of the potential for power plant efficiency improvements.** The high level of efficiency improvements that EPA projects at coal-based power plants (6%) may not be feasible because the coal generating fleet is being retrofitted with emission controls to comply with EPA's 2011 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, in many instances leading to decreased plant efficiency. Additional major investments in these plants are unlikely because EPA projects that the Clean

Power Plan will lead to significant reductions in electric generation at coal-based facilities, thus reducing the opportunity to recover investment costs. (EPA CPP RIA Table 3-11).

- ✓ **EPA projects 3.4% to 4.5% retail electric price increase in Mississippi for the proposed Clean Power rule in 2020** (EPA CPP RIA Table 3-21, Regions SRSE, SRDA, and SRCE). This increase will follow those anticipated due to compliance with EPA's 2011 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards rule. EPA projects that this rule will cost an average of \$9.6 billion annually, and will increase regional retail Mississippi electricity prices by 3.1% in 2015 (EPA MATS RIA, December 2011, Table 3-12, Region STV).
- ✓ **A recent assessment by National Economic Research Associates estimates that EPA's carbon rule could increase average Mississippi electric prices by 11% to 14% over the period 2017-2031, depending on the degree of compliance flexibility.** (NERA/ACCCE *et al.*, October 2014.)
- ✓ **The CPP will lead Mississippi to even greater dependence on natural gas as a main source of electric generation.** U.S. DOE projects that the price of natural gas delivered to electric utilities will increase at a compound annual rate of 3.1% above the rate of inflation between 2012 and 2040, the highest rate of real price increase for any delivered fuel in any sector of the economy (DOE Annual Energy Outlook 2014). **EPA projects that the Clean Power Plan will lead to further increases in delivered natural gas prices of 7.5% to 11.5% in 2020** (EPA CPP RIA, June 2014).
- ✓ **A new ozone standard could dramatically increase energy costs for all Mississippi consumers and industries.** EPA plans to revise the 2008 National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ozone, currently set at a level of 75 parts per billion (ppb), in late 2015. A July 2014 analysis by National Economic Research Associates of a potential new ozone standard set at a level of 60 ppb indicates that such a standard could result in the annual loss of \$270 billion in U.S. GDP over the period 2017 to 2040 due to higher energy costs related to industry compliance. If the standard constrained future natural gas production, the loss of annual GDP would rise to \$360 billion. NERA projects that national average residential electricity prices would increase by 3.3% to 15%, while residential natural gas prices would rise by up to 32% (NERA/NAM July 2014).

Low- and fixed-income seniors are among the most vulnerable to electric rate and other energy price increases. Current and pending U.S. EPA regulations will increase the price of electricity in Mississippi at rates above the general rate of inflation. Just maintaining the energy budget status quo for Mississippi's 65+ fixed income population requires stable electricity and other energy prices that do not increase above the rate of inflation.

#### Demographic Facts

- ✓ In 2012, seniors 65 and older accounted for 24% of Mississippi's 1.1 million households.
- ✓ More than one-third of Mississippi households received Social Security benefits in 2012.
- ✓ The average pre-tax household income of 65+ households in Mississippi was \$44,069 in 2012, 16% below the average Mississippi household income of \$52,677, and 38% below the national average gross household income.

#### Mississippi Household Income, 2012

Annual gross income	<\$30K	\$30-<\$50K	<\$50K	All households
All MS H/Hs (000)	453	224	677	1,091
Pct. of H/Hs	42%	21%	62%	100%
Avg. gross income	\$15,300	\$39,610	\$23,336	\$52,677
MS 65+ H/Hs (000)	135	53	188	259
Pct of 65+ H/Hs	52%	21%	73%	100%
Avg. 65+ gross income	\$15,821	\$39,560	\$22,548	\$44,069

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey (2014).

- ✓ Some 73% of Mississippi's 65+ households had gross incomes below \$50,000 in 2012, with an average pre-tax income of \$22,548 or \$1,879 per month before state and federal taxes.
- ✓ More than one-half of Mississippi's 65+ households had gross annual incomes below \$30,000 in 2012, with an average pre-tax household income of \$15,821 or \$1,318 per month.

### Energy Facts

Electricity and motor gasoline are the principal energy expenditures for Mississippi families, including 65+ households. Mississippi's total energy consumption per capita ranked 16th highest in the nation in 2012, at 380 million BTUs per person, 25% above the national average. Mississippi's per capita residential energy consumption in 2012 was 33rd highest in the nation, slightly above the national average (U.S. DOE, State Energy Data 2012).

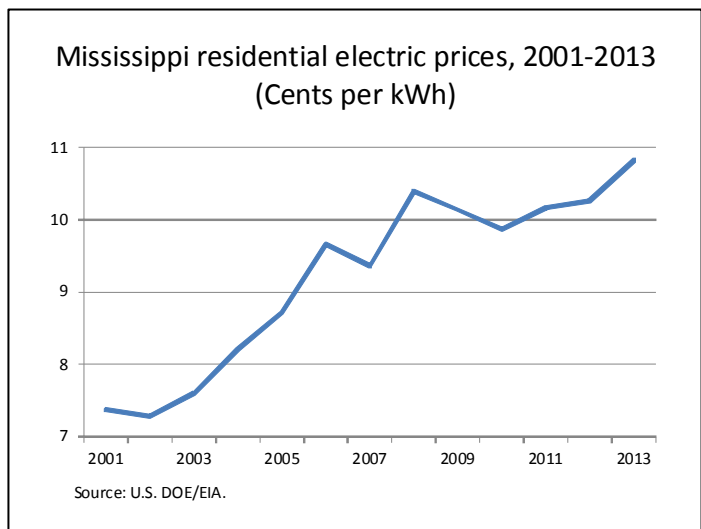
- ✓ Electricity accounts for an estimated 77% of average Mississippi household residential energy expenditures. For Mississippi's 259,000 65+ households, electricity represents 74% of total residential energy bills, as shown in the table below:

Mississippi annual residential energy expenditures, 2009

	Avg. energy expenditures	Electricity	Other	Electricity pct. of total expends.
All H/Hs	\$2,048	\$1,586	\$462	77%
65+ H/Hs	\$1,781	\$1,314	\$467	74%

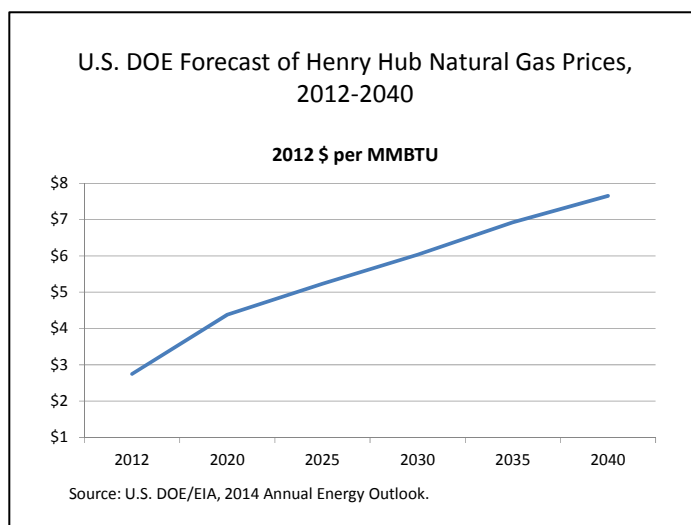
Source: U.S. DOE/EIA 2009 Residential Energy Consumption Survey (2012); Mississippi data provided by EIA.

- ✓ The price of electricity per kilowatt-hour (kWh) in Mississippi has increased by 47% since 2001, well above the 35% increase in inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index. This increase is due in part to higher fuel costs and the costs of compliance with EPA regulations. This has increased average annual electricity bills for 65+ households from \$1,314 in 2009 to an estimated \$1,402 in 2013.



- ✓ Increased residential natural gas prices also are on the horizon for Mississippi's elderly citizens. U.S. DOE projects that wellhead gas prices at the Henry Hub will increase in real terms by 90% from 2012 to 2025, from \$2.75 per MMBTU to \$5.23 per MMBTU. These price increases, shown in the chart below, do not

account for the substantial increase in natural gas demand expected to result from EPA's proposed regulations for reducing CO2 emissions from existing power plants:



### Electricity costs are straining elderly fixed-income household budgets

For Mississippi's 259,000 senior households with pre-tax incomes of \$50,000 or less in 2012, and an average pre-tax income of \$22,548, electric price increases are burdening household budgets constrained by modest Social Security cost-of-living (COLA) increases. There were no COLA increases in 2010 or 2011, and the October 2013 increase of 1.5% does not keep pace with the overall Consumer Price Index (US News & WR, Dec. 19, 2012).

- ✓ Projections of future residential electric price increases suggest that electric prices will increase at a rate well above the general rate of inflation in the economy, adversely impacting the hundreds of thousands of 65+ households in Mississippi living on fixed sources of income. The table below summarizes recent forecasts of national residential electric prices for 2025 through 2040, expressed in real (after inflation) prices per kilowatt-hour:

Comparison of residential electric price forecasts  
(In constant 2012 cents/kWh)

Source	2012	2025	2035	2040	Pct. Chg, 2012-2040
EIA AEO 2014	11.9	12.3	12.9	13.3	12%
IHSGI	11.9	13.6	14.4	14.5	22%
INFORUM	11.9	15.0	19.3	22.8	92%
Average	11.9	13.6	15.5	16.9	42%

Source: U.S. DOE/EIA Annual Energy Outlook 2014, Table CP4.

- ✓ The average of these three electricity price forecasts is a 42% overall increase in real (after inflation) residential electricity prices by the year 2040.

### EPA Clean Power Plan Impacts

EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan (CPP) for reducing carbon dioxide emissions from the nation's existing fossil-fueled power plants will increase electric prices for Mississippi's 65+ households. The proposed rule sets forth

"building blocks" of options for reducing emissions in Mississippi, focused on decreasing the use of coal in favor of natural gas, while increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy resources. EPA's goal is to reduce national CO2 emissions from electric utilities by 30% below 2005 levels.

The CPP proposal was issued In June 2014, just after EPA issued proposed regulations that effectively bar the construction of new coal-based generation plants (79 Fed. Reg. 1430, Jan. 8, 2014).

- ✓ In 2012, Mississippi relied on natural gas for 65% of its electricity fuel supply, with coal supplying 18% of the energy input for electric generation. Nuclear energy supplied most of the remainder. (DOE/EIA 2012 State Energy Data).
- ✓ Since 2005, EPA data indicate that Mississippi's fossil-fueled electric utilities have reduced emissions of carbon dioxide by 24%, measured in pounds of CO2 per Megawatt-hour (MWh) of electric generation. EPA's proposed CPP rule does not give credit for these reductions. It requires Mississippi to achieve an overall 37% reduction from 2012 in emissions of CO2 per Megawatt-hour, from 1,093 lbs. CO2/MWh in 2012 to 692 lbs. CO2/MWh in 2030. Initial reductions are to occur by 2020, with the final goal achieved by 2030.
- ✓ EPA's proposed plan for Mississippi compliance calls for 57% of the target reduction to be achieved by switching from low-cost coal generation to higher-cost natural gas. Another 36% of the reduction target is from renewable energy and increased energy efficiency measures among consumers and industry. The state will have flexibility in choosing among the measures it adopts, but the target emission reduction of 37% is federally enforceable under the Clean Air Act.
- ✓ EPA's Regulatory Impact Analysis for the CPP projects national costs of \$5.4 to \$7.4 billion annually in 2020. EPA's projections assume billions of dollars of annual savings from reductions of electric demand through widespread investments in energy efficiency measures.
- ✓ **EPA projects 3.4% to 4.5% regional retail electric price increases in most areas of Mississippi for the proposed Clean Power rule in 2020** (CPP RIA Table 3-21, Regions SRSE, SRDA, and SRCE). This projection is highly uncertain because it assumes that Mississippi will follow EPA's prescribed "building blocks" approach to emission reductions. If the flexibility measures in EPA's proposed rule prove unworkable, or are limited by judicial decisions, higher rate impacts could result.
- ✓ **A recent assessment by National Economic Research Associates estimates that EPA's carbon rule could increase average Mississippi electric prices by 11% to 14% over the period 2017-2031, depending on the degree of compliance flexibility.** (NERA/ACCCE *et al.*, October 2014.)
- ✓ **EPA's proposed "building blocks" for state emission reductions contain unrealistic assumptions on the potential for large-scale renewable energy and energy efficiency development within the short timetable of the EPA rule, and untenable projections of the potential for power plant efficiency improvements.** The high level of efficiency improvements that EPA projects at coal-based power plants (6%) may not be feasible because the coal generating fleet is being retrofitted with emission controls to comply with EPA's 2011 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, in many instances leading to decreased plant efficiency. Additional major investments in these plants are unlikely because EPA projects that the Clean Power Plan will lead to significant reductions in electric generation at coal-based facilities, thus reducing the opportunity to recover investment costs. (See, EPA CPP RIA Table 3-11).
- ✓ Both the timing and stringency of EPA's proposed reductions will challenge Mississippi's electric utilities, and will lead Mississippi to greater dependence on natural gas as a main source of electric generation. U.S. DOE projects that the price of natural gas delivered to electric utilities will increase at a compound annual rate of 3.1% above the rate of inflation between 2012 and 2040, the highest rate of real price increase for any delivered fuel in any sector of the economy (DOE Annual Energy Outlook 2014). **EPA projects that the Clean Power Plan will lead to further increases in delivered natural gas prices of 7.5% to 11.5% in 2020** (EPA CPP RIA, June 2014).

Mississippi Power recently announced plans to convert several of its low-cost coal generating units to natural gas, pursuant to a settlement agreement with the Sierra Club. These actions will increase natural gas demand and prices for all consumers:

Gulfport, Miss. – In order to most economically comply with new federal environmental standards and meet obligations under a settlement with the Sierra Club, Mississippi Power is planning to repower, convert to natural gas, or retire several units at plants Watson, Sweatt and Greene County.

Mississippi Power will no longer use coal at Plant Watson, converting its two remaining coal-fired units to natural gas no later than April 16, 2015. The plant already has three units that operate on natural gas.

At Plant Sweatt, the company commits to retire two of the existing natural gas units, repower with more advanced technology or convert to an alternative non fossil-fuel source, no later than Dec. 31, 2018.

And at Plant Greene County, Mississippi Power will cease coal operations and convert two units to natural gas no later than April 16, 2016. ...

See, <http://www.mississippipowernews.com/2014/08/04/mississippi-power-announces-settlement-with-sierra-club-conversions-or-closures-of-some-generating-units-2/>

## Fuel Diversity at Risk

The prospective reduction of fuel diversity in Mississippi's electric generating fleet due to greater dependence on natural gas for compliance with environmental requirements and the Sierra Club settlement will create additional risks of electric price volatility and higher costs for elderly consumers. A recent special report by IHS examined alternative scenarios of electric supply diversity and found that household disposable incomes could be reduced by more than \$2,000 annually where electric fuel supply choices are constrained:

To illustrate the importance of power supply diversity at the national level, IHS compared a base case—reflecting the generation mix in regional US power systems during the 2010-2012 period—with a reduced diversity case (a generating mix without meaningful contributions from coal and nuclear power and with a smaller contribution from hydroelectric power along with an increased share of renewable power. The remaining three-quarters of generation in the scenario come from natural gas-fired plants).

In this comparison, IHS found that the cost of generating electricity in the reduced diversity case was more than \$93 billion higher per year and the potential variability of monthly power bills was 50 percent higher compared to the base case. As a consequence, the study calculates that the typical household's annual disposable income to be around \$2,100 less in the reduced diversity scenario, there would be around one million fewer jobs compared to the base case and US gross domestic product (GDP) would be nearly \$200 billion less. Additional costs would arise if current trends lead to the retirement and replacement of existing power plants before it was economic to do so. See, <http://www.ihs.com/info/0714/power-diversity-special-report.aspx?ocid=uspowderv:pressrls:01>

## Additional Regulatory Impacts

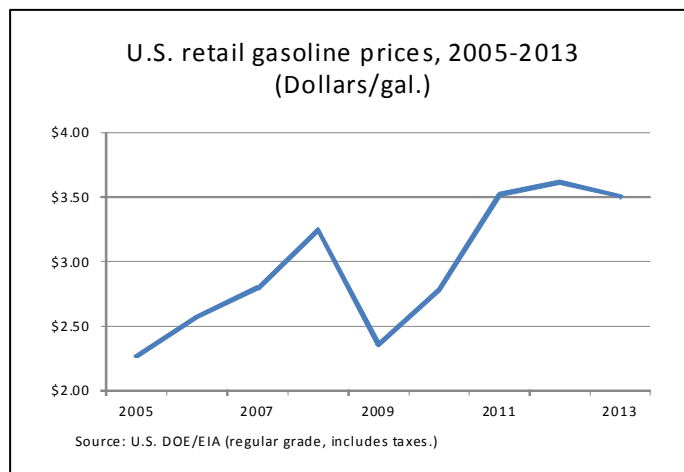
Recent and pending U.S. EPA regulations will add further cost pressures to the electric generating sector over the next few years, directly impacting electric bills in Mississippi.

- ✓ EPA's Regulatory Impact Analysis for its 2011 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards projects that this rule will cost an average of \$9.6 billion annually, and will increase regional retail Mississippi electricity prices by 3.1% in 2015 (EPA MATS RIA, December 2011, Table 3-12, Region STV).

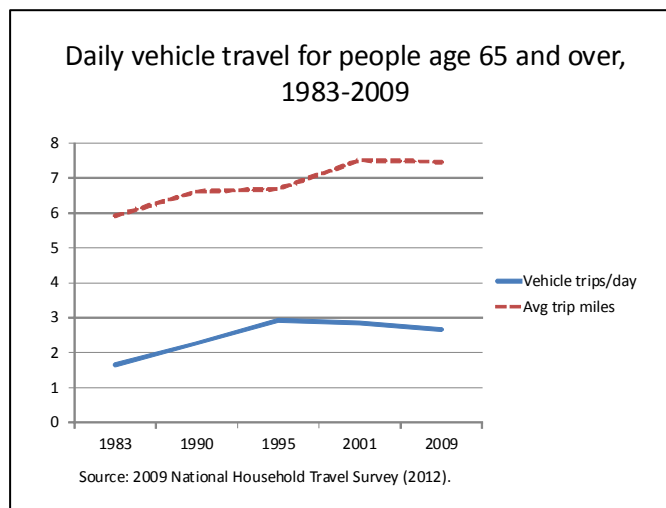
- ✓ **A new ozone standard could dramatically increase energy costs for all Mississippi consumers and industries.** EPA plans to revise the 2008 National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ozone, currently set at a level of 75 parts per billion (ppb), in late 2015. A July 2014 analysis by National Economic Research Associates of a potential new ozone standard set at a level of 60 ppb indicates that such a standard could result in the annual loss of \$270 billion in U.S. GDP over the period 2017 to 2040 due to higher energy costs related to industry compliance. If the standard constrained future natural gas production, the loss of annual GDP would rise to \$360 billion. NERA projects that national average residential electricity prices would increase by 3.3% to 15%, while residential natural gas prices would rise by up to 32% (NERA/NAM July 2014).

### Gasoline costs remain high

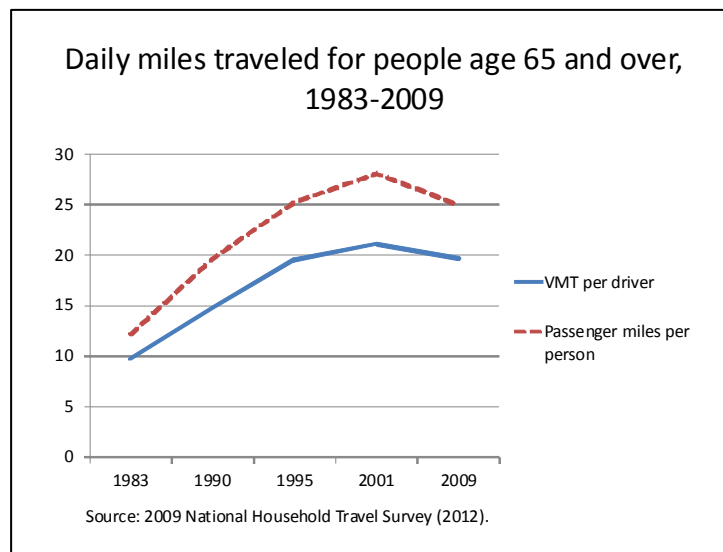
For most American households, gasoline is the largest single consumer energy expenditure. Gasoline prices have declined recently, but the long-term outlook is for continued high prices. U.S. DOE projects average gasoline prices of \$3.38 per gallon in 2015 (DOE/EIA, Short-Term Energy Outlook, October 2014).



- ✓ Average retail gasoline prices per gallon have increased by 55% since 2005, a rate nearly three times greater than the 19% rate of inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index.
- ✓ Seniors 65+ drive fewer miles annually than younger people, since most are not commuting to work or school. Gasoline costs nevertheless are a significant annual energy expense for most senior citizens.
- ✓ U.S. DOT's 2009 National Household Travel Survey (2012) shows that 65+ seniors have increased their average vehicle miles traveled (VMT) since 1983, through a combination of more daily vehicle trips per driver and longer average vehicle trip lengths:



- ✓ The average number of daily vehicle trips per 65+ driver increased by 61% from 1983 to 2009, while average trip length increased by 26%, from 5.9 miles in 1983 to 7.5 miles in 2009.
- ✓ Average daily vehicle miles traveled per 65+ driver more than doubled between 1983 and 2009, from 9.8 miles to 19.7 miles, as shown in the chart below:



- ✓ The vast majority of 65+ citizens are drivers. Some 91% of persons aged 60 to 69 are drivers, while 83% of those aged 70 to 79 drive. More than 60% of the 80+ population also drive (2009 NHTS, 2012).
- ✓ With an expected 60% increase in the number of 65+ persons over the next 15 years, the proportion of 65+ drivers on the road will increase from 15% in 2009 to 20% by 2025 (AARP Public Policy Institute, 2011).
- ✓ Assuming an average of 19.7 miles driven per day for 65+ drivers, and 17 miles per gallon for the average fuel economy of light duty vehicles now on the road, Mississippi's 65+ drivers will each spend approximately \$1,500 annually with gasoline prices of \$3.50 per gallon.

### Social Security Is At Risk

Social Security is a principal source of income for Mississippi's senior citizens. In 2012, one-third of Mississippi households received Social Security benefits averaging \$15,500 per household (Bureau of the Census, 2012 American Community Survey, 2014). The future stability of this income, however, cannot be assured due to the rapidly changing dynamics of the U.S. population, and the projected increase in Social Security recipients. The Congressional Budget Office's latest assessment of the health of the Social Security system reveals the extent of these risks:

In calendar year 2010, for the first time since the enactment of the Social Security Amendments of 1983, annual outlays for the program exceeded annual tax revenues (that is, outlays exceeded total revenues excluding interest credited to the trust funds). In 2012, outlays exceeded noninterest income by about 7 percent, and CBO projects that the gap will average about 12 percent of tax revenues over the next decade. As more members of the baby-boom generation retire, outlays will increase relative to the size of the economy, whereas tax revenues will remain at an almost constant share of the economy. As a result, the gap will grow larger in the 2020s and will exceed 30 percent of revenues by 2030.

CBO projects that under current law, the DI (Disability Insurance) trust fund will be exhausted in fiscal year 2017, and the OASI (Old Age and Survivors) trust fund will be exhausted in 2033. If a



trust fund's balance fell to zero and current revenues were insufficient to cover the benefits specified in law, the Social Security Administration would no longer have legal authority to pay full benefits when they were due. In 1994, legislation redirected revenues from the OASI trust fund to prevent the imminent exhaustion of the DI trust fund. In part because of that experience, it is a common analytical convention to consider the DI and OASI trust funds as combined. Thus, CBO projects, if some future legislation shifted resources from the OASI trust fund to the DI trust fund, the combined OASDI trust funds would be exhausted in 2031. See, <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/44972>.

## Conclusion

Low- and fixed-income seniors are among the most vulnerable to electric rate and other energy price increases. Current and pending U.S. EPA regulations will increase the price of electricity in Mississippi at rates above the general rate of inflation. Rising oil and natural gas prices will add further pressure on residential natural gas and gasoline prices. The 70% of Mississippi's 65+ households with gross incomes less than \$50,000 annually will be among those least able to afford these energy price increases.

Just maintaining the energy budget status quo for Mississippi's 65+ fixed income population requires stable electricity and other energy prices that do not increase above the rate of inflation. Lower-income seniors are among those least likely to make major investments in new energy efficiency programs with long investment payback times, as envisioned by EPA's Clean Power Plan. The suite of new regulations EPA is now pursuing inevitably will lead to ever-higher utility prices for Mississippi's elderly population, exceeding the modest cost-of-living (COLA) adjustments that many 65+ retirees depend upon just to keep up with inflationary pressures.

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Acknowledgment: This paper was prepared for the 60 Plus Association by Eugene M. Trisko, an independent energy economist and attorney (B.A., Economics and Politics, NYU, 1972; J.D., Georgetown University Law Center, 1977). Mr. Trisko has served as an expert economic witness before state public utility commissions, and as an attorney in the Federal Trade Commission Bureau of Consumer Protection. He may be contacted at emtrisko@earthlink.net.