

March 10, 2021



**FROM THE DESK OF  
COMMISSIONER  
BRENT BAILEY  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OFFICE**



*The Central District is pleased to bring you the latest information concerning utility rates, project developments, Public Service Commission actions and other news you can use. I hope you will find this information to be a useful resource to learn about the Public Service Commission, consumer issues and the continuous work we are doing for the citizens in the Central District and across the state of Mississippi. Thank you again for allowing me to serve you in this capacity.*

*Brent Bailey*

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## **National Consumer Protection Week:**

### **Take Action to Protect Your Privacy, Manage Your Money and Avoid Scams**

From February 28 to March 6, 2021, federal, state and local agencies, consumer groups, and advocacy organizations all across the nation helped people understand their consumer rights and make well-informed decisions about money under the banner of National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW). NCPW is a coordinated campaign designed to focus on the importance of keeping consumers informed while providing them with resources explaining their rights in the marketplace.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) works with partners to hold events to educate consumers over a range of topics, including avoiding coronavirus scams, phishing, utility imposters, and cyber fraud. Consumers are bombarded everyday by fraudsters and many times we may not immediately know it. But recognizing common signs of a scam could help you avoid becoming a victim.

## **4 SIGNS THAT IT'S A SCAM**

### **1. Scammers pretend to be from an organization you know.**

Scammers often pretend to be contacting you on behalf of the government or pretend to be from a business you know, like a utility company.

### **2. Scammers say there's a problem or a prize.**

They might say you're in trouble with the government. Or you owe money. Others will lie and say you won money in a lottery or sweepstakes but have to pay a fee to get it.

### **3. Scammers pressure you to act immediately.**

Scammers want you to act before you have time to think. They might threaten to arrest you, sue you, take away your driver's or business license, or say your computer is about to be corrupted.

### **4. Scammers tell you to pay in a specific way.**

They often insist that you pay by sending money through a money transfer company or by putting money on a gift card and then mailing the card to them.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO AVOID A SCAM**

- ☒ **Block unwanted calls and text messages.** Take steps to [block unwanted calls](#) and to [filter unwanted text messages](#).
- ☒ **Don't give your personal or financial information in response to a request that you didn't expect.** Legitimate organizations won't call, email, or text to ask for your personal information, like your Social Security, bank account, or credit card numbers.
- ☒ **Resist the pressure to act immediately.** Legitimate businesses will give you time to make a decision.



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- ☑ **Know how scammers tell you to pay.** Never pay someone who insists you pay with a gift card or by using a money transfer service.
- ☑ **Stop and talk to someone you trust.** Before you do anything else, tell someone — a friend, a family member, a neighbor — what happened. Talking about it could help you realize it's a scam.

*If you suspect fraud, or think you may be the victim of a scam, please contact the Office of the Attorney General Consumer Protection Division at (601) 359-4230 or (800) 281-4418. You can also report scams to the [Federal Trade Commission](#).*

## Robocalls on the Rise

Americans experienced a significant drop in the amount of robocalls flooding their phones in 2020, helped by international call centers shutting down during the global pandemic and government efforts to stop phone scams. At the time, YouMail reported the number of robocalls made to U.S. phone numbers in April 2020 was the lowest in two years. That included both scam and legitimate calls, such as payment reminders from banks.



Unfortunately, robocalls are back up to pre-pandemic levels. Americans received more than 4.6 billion robocalls in February, up 15% compared to January. About 159.1 million robocalls were placed each day in February. So far, 2021 is on pace to reach 51.5 billion robocalls, a big jump from 2020 (45.9 billion). Americans received 58.5 billion robocalls in 2019. The leading illegal types of robocalls involved car warranties and health-related scams.

**Mississippi ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in the nation in calls per capita at 14.7 in February.** (Tennessee led the nation with 27.4 calls per person! Alabama, South Carolina, Louisiana and Arkansas round out the top 5. Fewest calls per capita: Alaska at 4.8.

## Solutions on the Horizon

In addition to adding your phone number to the [National Do Not Call Registry](#) and the [Mississippi No Call List](#), you can also look into [call-blocking solutions](#). These will help until a new technology is implemented to reduce fraudulent calls. The technology, Secure Telephone Identity Revisited (STIR) and Signature-based Handling of Asserted Information Using toKENs (SHAKEN) standards, must be implemented by telecommunication carriers by June 30, 2021.

The STIR/SHAKEN framework is a set of technical standards and protocols that requires calls traveling through interconnected phone networks to have their caller ID "signed" as legitimate by originating carriers and validated by other carriers before reaching consumers. STIR/SHAKEN digitally validates the handoff of phone calls passing through the complex web of networks, erodes the ability of callers to illegally spoof a number, and allows consumers and law enforcement to more readily identify the source of illegal robocalls. Americans could start to have faith in their phone calls again!!

In the meantime, the MPSC and the [FTC](#) will keep bringing enforcement actions against robocallers. Last week, the MPSC imposed civil penalties of \$280,000 [against a telemarketer](#) for 32 violations of the state's No-Call Law. Keep reporting those unwanted calls and let's end the scourge of robocalls!!



## Other News

### Winter Weather Impact on Natural Gas

For the weeks ending February 13 and 20, the U.S. experienced temperatures 26 and 39 percent colder than normal, respectively, as measured by heating degree days. Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Arkansas experienced more than twice the normal number of heating degree days. The U.S. set a two-day record for natural gas consumption over February 14 and 15 as an arctic air mass over much of the U.S. drove heating and electricity demand skyward.



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The frigid temperatures led to declines in inflowing gas production, boosted natural gas storage withdrawals and imports, and led to temporary decreases in natural gas exports. In some geographic areas, the market rationalized the sharp changes in supply and demand with triple-digit cash prices for spot gas. In Oklahoma, Oneok Gas Transmission reached what might be the highest natural gas price at any natural gas hub in history at an average of \$1,192/MMBtu on February 17. As temperatures eased, dry-gas production, imports, exports, and prices returned to pre-event levels reaching \$2.84/MMBtu on February 22 at the Henry Hub. Furthermore, WTI and Brent oil prices continue to climb, reaching their highest prices in more than a year. As of March 9, WTI oil was trading at \$64.14 and Brent crude was trading at \$67.61.

## **New Research Paper Examines the Questions Underlying the Texas Energy Crisis**

In response to the February extreme cold weather event in Texas, resulting in significant electric outages across the Electric Reliability Council of Texas system, the National Regulatory Research Institute has published a new paper in its Insights series: "[Regulatory Questions Engendered by the Texas Energy Crisis of 2021](#)." The paper analyzes the current regulatory regime and market design and how each contributed to the situation in Texas.

## **Washington Action Alert**

Sen. Roger Wicker and others sent a letter to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel inquiring about the agency's status on completing its mapping process to ensure accurate broadband data collection. Click [here](#) to read the full letter.

The [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#), a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus package, passed the Senate on March 6 by a vote of 50-49. The U.S. House of Representatives is expected to take up the bill today.



## **Legislation Tracker**

- [HB 100](#): Extends repeal date that requires all fees collected under the MS Telephone Solicitation Act be deposited into the General Fund.  
*Passed Senate Floor*
- [HB 632](#): Establishes "All Fuels Act of 2021" and provides that no political subdivision may prohibit the expansion, connection, or reconnection of a service based upon the type of energy provided to a customer.  
*Passed Senate Floor*
- [HB 942](#): Authorizes investor-owned electric utilities to permit broadband provider use of the electric delivery system.  
*Passed Senate Energy Committee as Amended*
- [HB 1396](#): Act making an appropriation from general fund in the state treasury for the purpose of defraying the expenses of the MPSC for the 2022 fiscal year.  
*Referred to Senate Appropriations*
- [SB 2018](#): MS Telephone Solicitation Act; extend repealer on requirement that fees be deposited into State General Fund.  
*Passed House Floor as was Amended in Committee*
- [SB 2649](#): Extends Repeal Date on EE Equipment or Service Contracts.  
*Passed House Floor as was Amended in Committee*





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- [SB 2798](#): Provides for the participation of investor-owned electric utilities in the expansion of broadband services.

*Passed House Public Utilities Committee as Amended*

*The deadline for Committees to consider and report general bills originating in the other chamber was March 2. The deadline for Floor Action on general bills originating in the other chamber is TODAY. Please note that identification of a bill in this newsletter does not indicate support or opposition to a measure. We will continue to monitor progress of these and other legislation impacting the MPSC.*

## Last week at the MPSC

- ✎ **Atmos Energy Corporation** filed its [Notice of Intent](#) for its proposed capital budget and system integrity plan for the fiscal year 2022. **Atmos Energy** filed a [Petition for Temporary Waiver](#) in regards to plans and specifications for a project in Montgomery County. **Atmos Energy** also filed its [Construction Notice](#) pertaining to the Fernwood Drive project in Jackson. This project is for replacement of 9,195 feet of steel main and 135 services on multiple streets in West Jackson. Project cost estimated at \$1.8 million.
- ✎ The Commission issued Suspension Orders to the following: [Atmos Energy](#) to allow further review of its proposed capital budget for FY 2021; [Entergy Mississippi, LLC](#) for further review of the company's Vegetation Management Rider request; **Mississippi Power Company** to allow further review of its 2021 Environmental Compliance Overview ([ECO filing](#)) and its [Ad Valorem Tax Adjustment Factor](#) for April 2021 through March 2022 filing.
- ✎ The Public Utilities Staff approved tariff pages for the following: [CenterPoint Energy Mississippi](#); [Town of Edwards](#); [City of Greenville](#). The **City of Greenville** also filed its [Certification of Sewer Rate Increases](#) that became effective October 2020.
- ✎ **Hernando Ventures, LLC** filed its [Motion to Intervene](#) in **Entergy Mississippi, LLC's** petition for CPCN for a 230-KV substation and related transmission and distribution lines and other facilities in DeSoto County.
- ✎ The **National Audubon Society** filed a [motion to intervene](#) in the Net Metering Docket, 2021-AD-19.
- ✎ **CableSouth Media III, LLC** filed an [Application for ETC Designation](#) to provide broadband service in unserved and underserved areas in South Mississippi.
- ✎ **Telepak Networks, Inc.** filed its [Petition](#) to Partially Discontinue Certain Services impacting approximately 55 phone-only accounts, 1 email and domain account, 12 DSL/phone and/or email accounts, and 15 email-only accounts.



Last week, our Consumer Complaint Specialists handled a total of **45** complaints in the Central District.

Electric Companies	27
Water/Sewer	9
Telecommunications	7
Natural Gas	2

Last week, the Central District received a total of **340** complaints from consumers against potential telemarketers through our no call app, website and mail-ins. The top three general issues reported by consumers are related to auto warranties, insurance and credit cards.

*We encourage consumers to file telemarketing complaints with the Federal Trade Commission at <http://www.donotcall.gov/> in addition to filing complaints with the Mississippi Public Service*