

March 17, 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

***No One Escaped the Impact of the COVID-19,
Including the MPSC***

The last 12 months has tested the resolve of Americans and of people around the world. Things that we took for granted, actions that we do every day without a second thought, and our plans for the "immediate future" were suddenly cast into disarray by an invisible virus that quickly circled the globe.

- On March 11, 2020, the Mississippi Department of Health confirmed the first presumptive case of the novel coronavirus in Mississippi.
- On March 13, 2020, six weeks after then health secretary Alex Azar declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) a national public health emergency, President Trump declared a national state of emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- On March 14, 2020, Governor Reeves recognized that COVID-19 within Mississippi constitutes a public emergency and declared a State of Emergency directing state agencies to do everything reasonably possible to assist communities.
- On March 15, 2020, the Mississippi Public Service Commission (MPSC) placed a moratorium on the disconnection of any water, sewer, natural gas and electric service to any customer for non-payment for such services. The moratorium lasted until May 26, 2020.
- On April 1, 2020, Governor Reeves issued Executive Order 1466 directing Mississippians to shelter in place and close certain businesses and public amenities.
- On April 24, 2020, Governor Reeves issued Executive Order 1477 outlining a Safer at Home protocol and allowing certain businesses to resume operations.
- On May 12, 2020, the MPSC encouraged all utilities to offer reasonable payment plans to customers who accrued past-due balances on their bills. The MPSC also created a [webpage](#) containing links to state and federal financial assistance programs and links to utility customer service contacts.
- On March 3, 2021, Governor Reeves lifted all state-imposed mask mandates and removed state-imposed restrictions on business operations.

While the functions of the Commission are nearly back to "normal," we still have not opened our monthly Docket Meetings to the general public. Out of state travel for most Commissioners and staff have not resumed and community outreach events are few and far between. It has been difficult to personally connect with constituents. However, our phones and email has remained quite busy as customers continue to question utility bills, service quality and utility service access.

Although the previously mentioned moratorium on utility disconnections for non-payments was lifted by the MPSC on May 26, 2020, all the rate-regulated utilities voluntarily extended the disconnection moratoriums for their customers while also implementing deferred payment plans and other payment assistance programs to help customers who were facing economic hardship and unable to pay their bills in full.



Continued...

One utility has even gone as far as voluntarily foregoing the collection of bad debt associated with COVID-19. Therefore, MS Power Company and its shareholders will forego recovery of approximately \$1.5 million in COVID-related costs despite the MPSC allowing utilities to defer those costs to a regulatory asset and recover through rates.

As of this writing, Mississippi has experienced 301,250 cases of COVID-19 while 6,929 Mississippians have succumbed to the effects of the virus. Across the U.S., total cases are up to 29,570,682 with deaths now at 536,433. Thankfully, the number of daily new cases of COVID-19 continues to drop as safety guidelines are adhered to and the number of vaccine doses administered climbs. 109,081,860 vaccine doses have been given to people and 38,335,432 people are fully vaccinated.

While it may still be months before we find “normal” again, things are certainly looking up. However, we must not get careless and take our eye off the goal. So many people have stepped up to help others during the past year and sacrificed much along the way. We must all make sure those efforts were not made in vain.



Other News

New solar project announced for Washington County, MS

McNew Renewables [announced](#) that it plans to invest \$165M in Washington County to support the construction of a 200-megawatt solar facility. The Washington County Economic Alliance has reportedly been working on this project for a couple of years. The facility is expected to be operational by 2024.

Renewables Accounted for 20.6% of US Electricity Generated in 2020

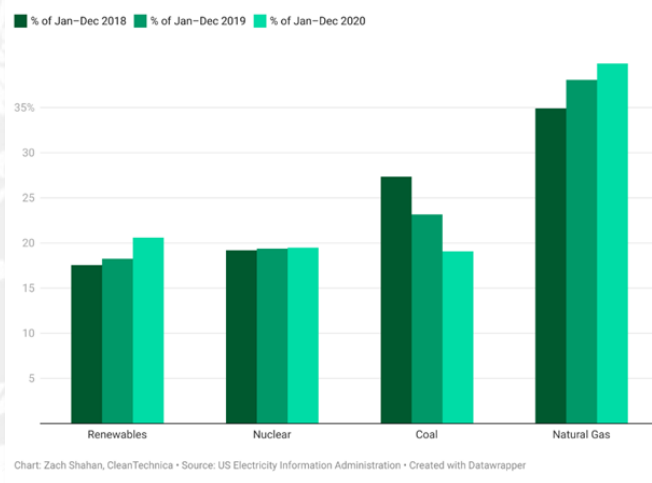
[Renewable energy resources](#) continue to grow as a part of the nation’s electricity generation portfolio. While nuclear and natural gas each saw its share in generation rise, coal saw a significant drop in generation utilization.

Furthermore, solar power and wind power accounted for 77.1% of new installed utility-scale power capacity in the United States in 2020. Natural gas accounted for 18.9% of new US power capacity in 2020.

However, fossil fuels still dominate the rankings of total installed generation capacity in the U.S. with natural gas at 539.56 GW (gigawatts), coal at 239.24 GW, wind at 119.67 GW, nuclear at 104.32 GW, hydropower at 101.04 GW and solar at 52.58 GW.

Other sources combine for nearly 60 GW of generation capacity.

US Electricity Generation Share by Source



U.S. Power Demand Expected to Increase in 2021

Last week, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) [predicted](#) that U.S. power consumption will rise 2.1% in 2021 as state and local governments ease COVID lockdowns due to increasing vaccinations and a reduction in daily new cases.

The EIA predicts that power demand will rise to 3,883 billion kilowatt hours in 2021 and 3,936 billion kWh in 2022 from a coronavirus-depressed 11-year low of 3,804 billion kWh in 2020.



Continued...

The all-time high of 4,003 billion kWh in power consumption was recorded in 2018.

Of the nation's projected power generation portfolio in 2021, the EIA predicts that natural gas will account for 36%, coal at 23%, nuclear at 20% and renewables at 21%.



Legislation Tracker

- [HB 100](#): Extends repeal date that requires all fees collected under the MS Telephone Solicitation Act be deposited into the General Fund.

Signed by House & Senate, Awaiting Governor to Sign or Veto

- [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.

Signed by House & Senate, Awaiting Governor to Sign or Veto

- [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.

Passed Senate as Amended then returned for Concurrence

- [SB 2649](#): Extends Repeal Date on EE Equipment or Service Contracts.

Reconsidered, Declined to Concur & Invited Conference

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

Senate Conferees named: Joel Carter, Rita Potts Parks, John Polk

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

✎ **Airus Inc.** submitted a [Reply Brief](#) to the Answer of **BellSouth Telecommunications** d/b/ a **AT&T** asserting that the Answer contains certain misstatements that could confuse or mislead the Commission.

✎ **Atmos** filed its [Monthly Report](#) on Meter Estimations. Only 939 customers received a third estimated bill due to complications from the February winter storm event.

✎ **CenterPoint Energy Resources Corp.** filed a [Motion](#) to Correct Scrivener's Error to address mistakes made when drafting, copying, and/or transmitting their original Notice filing of Routine Changes to its Gas Facility Extension Policy to become effective April 1, 2021.



Last week, our Consumer Complaint Specialists handled a total of **27** complaints in the Central District.

Electric Companies	17
Water/Sewer	4
Telecommunications	5
Natural Gas	1

Last week, the Central District received a total of **331** 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