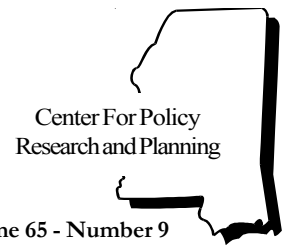


MISSISSIPPI'S BUSINESS



September 2007

Monitoring the State's Economy

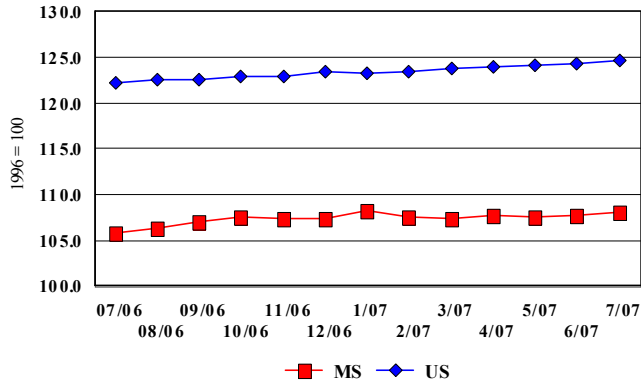
Volume 65 - Number 9

ECONOMY AT A GLANCE

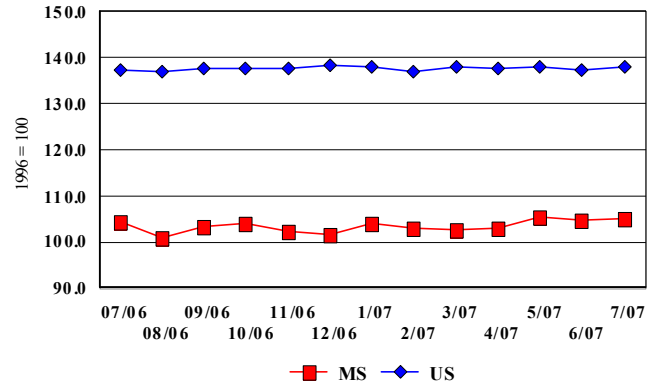
The Mississippi Index of Coincident Economic Indicators rose slightly in July relative to June. The index has been essentially flat since January, a marked slowdown since from the 2.2 percent growth observed in 2006. While employment is at an all time high, the state is only 1,300 jobs above the peak of 2000. The growth taking place in the state is largely due to Katrina rebuilding. The Mississippi Index of Leading Economic Indicators rose a slight 0.3 percent. The gain was tenuous as it was due to a strong increase in consumer expectations accompanied by modest negative contributions from the remaining components. Consumer expectations have since declined.

The national coincident and leading indicators improved in July relative to June. The Conference Board anticipates slow growth in the economy. Due to the threat of recession brought on by the troubles in the subprime mortgage industry, the Fed lowered the Federal Fund's rate. The stock market has responded positively. By showing the market that they are willing to act decisively, the Fed hopes to improve consumer and business confidence and stave off a recession.

Index of Coincident Indicators



Index of Leading Indicators



MISSISSIPPI'S BUSINESS

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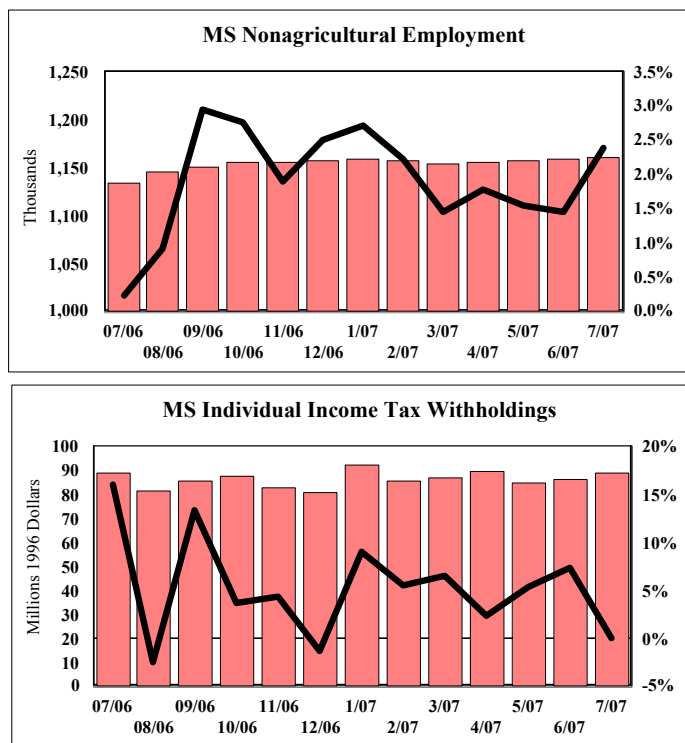
Coincident Indicators

The July Mississippi Index of Coincident Indicators was 108.2, essentially equal to the historical peak obtained in January 2007. The July index was 0.4 percent above the revised June index. The series has fluctuated only slightly over the first seven months of 2007. The growth in the index between January and July is noticeably slower than the 2.2 percent growth observed in 2006.

After adjusting for seasonality, there were an estimated 1,160,600 people employed in Mississippi in July, a new historical peak. This was 0.2 percent or 2,668 jobs more than were employed in June. The July level was 1,300 jobs more than the previous peak set in May 2000. Following the peak in 2000, the state's employment level slide precipitously, hitting a low in June 2003. During this period, the state lost almost 53,000 jobs. Recovery from this decline has been slow.

In regard to the July 2007 employment increase over June, the largest monthly gains came in construction, local government and manufacturing. The increase in construction employment is the second consecutive increase and follows two months of decline. These data indicate that the state has more people employed in construction than at any other time in history. Recent troubles in the housing industry

Mississippi Index of Coincident Indicator Components



NOTE:

The bar graphs above represent the seasonally adjusted monthly series and correspond to the left-hand axis. The line graphs represents the growth rate over the prior year's value and correspond to the right-hand axis.

SOURCES:

Mississippi Employment Security Commission.
Mississippi State Tax Commission.

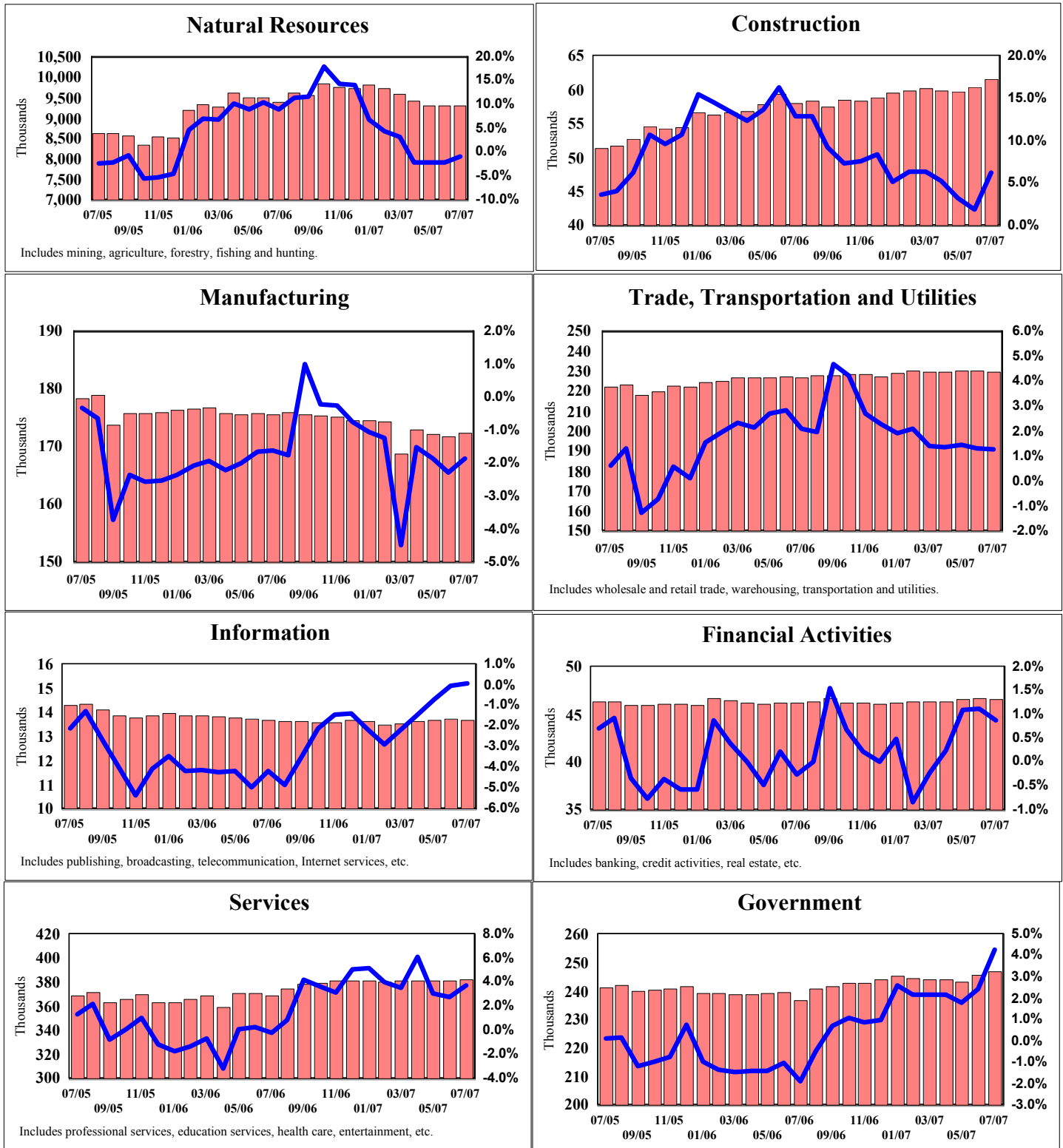
Mississippi Employment By Sector

	July 2007	June 2007	Seasonally Adjusted		Change from Last Year	
			July 2006	Change from Last Month # of Emp. %	# of Emp. %	
Non farm Employment	1,160,584	1,157,916	1,133,536	2,668 0.2%	27,048 2.4%	
Natural Resources	9,304	9,314	9,399	(10) -0.1%	(95) -1.0%	
Construction	61,496	60,311	57,902	1,185 2.0%	3,594 6.2%	
Manufacturing	172,231	171,700	175,482	531 0.3%	(3,251) -1.9%	
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	229,300	229,902	226,467	(602) -0.3%	2,833 1.3%	
Retail	143,397	143,966	143,055	(569) -0.4%	342 0.2%	
Information	13,682	13,696	13,674	(14) -0.1%	8 0.1%	
Financial Activities	46,604	46,694	46,197	(90) -0.2%	407 0.9%	
Services	381,747	381,170	368,172	577 0.2%	13,575 3.7%	
Professional and Business Services	96,689	96,261	93,172	428 0.4%	3,517 3.8%	
Education and Health Services	125,734	125,824	122,176	(90) -0.1%	3,558 2.9%	
Leisure and Hospitality	122,024	121,992	115,745	32 0.0%	6,279 5.4%	
Other Services	37,300	37,093	37,079	207 0.6%	221 0.6%	
Total Government	246,772	245,473	236,656	1,299 0.5%	10,116 4.3%	
Federal	25,801	25,781	26,479	20 0.1%	(678) -2.6%	
State	60,036	59,673	58,133	363 0.6%	1,903 3.3%	
Local	160,737	159,872	152,183	865 0.5%	8,554 5.6%	

Data may not add due to rounding.

Source: Mississippi Department of Employment Security

Mississippi Employment Trends



NOTE:

The bar graphs above represent the seasonally adjusted monthly series and correspond to the left-hand axis. The line graphs represent the growth over the prior year's value and correspond to the right-hand axis.

SOURCE:

Mississippi Employment Security Commission.

suggest that much of this construction is nonresidential. National construction spending declined for the month of July, but this was driven by slowdown in residential construction -- a trend that has been going on for several months. National nonresidential and public construction have continued to increase.

Mississippi's individual income tax withholdings were up 3.2 percent in July relative to June. The historical peak for this series was in January 2007. The July level was 96.7 percent of the January level.

Leading Indicators

The Mississippi Index of Leading Economic Indicators rose 0.3 percent in July relative to June. The July index was 105.1. The increase was tenuous relying exclusively on the strength of one of the five components. The relatively small negative shifts in the remaining four components allowed the modest increase in the index for July.

The U.S. Index of Consumer Expectations rose 6.8 points to 81.5 in July relative to June. The increase was fueled by a brief dip in gasoline prices and improved stock prices. Since July, these trends reversed and the U.S. Index of Consumer Expectations has declined.

Mississippi initial unemployment claims rose 5.1 percent for the month of July relative to June. Historically this is a small shift for this series. Initial claims had declined the previous three months.

The value of Mississippi residential building permits fell 2.2 percent in July relative to June. With the exception of a strong increase in January, the series has declined every month since November 2006. The downward trend reflects the trouble in the national housing market. Tightening lending conditions, are having a dampening effect on housing demand, while increased foreclosures are keeping inventories high and putting downward pressure on prices. Experts do not believe we have yet hit bottom with regard to foreclosures. These weak fundamentals offer little hope for upward momentum in sales activity this year. The state is affected by these same fundamentals as reflected in the declining value of building permits.

While it is true the national market is heavily influenced by a few of large states, Mississippi has mortgage delinquency rates well above the national average. There appears to be some downward pressure on prices in Mississippi, but not to the degree observed in states such as Arizona California, Florida and Nevada. These are the key states where the subprime mortgage problems are most severe.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) Index of U.S. Manufacturing Activity fell 1.7 percent in August relative to July. (The August ISM Index is used in the July Mississippi Leading Index). This was the second consecutive monthly decline. Despite the decline, the index shows an expanding industry.

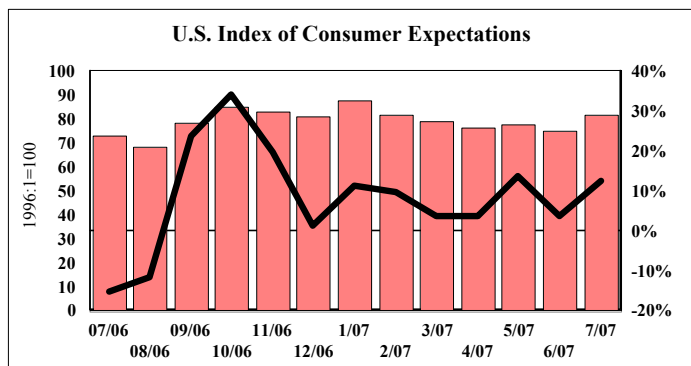
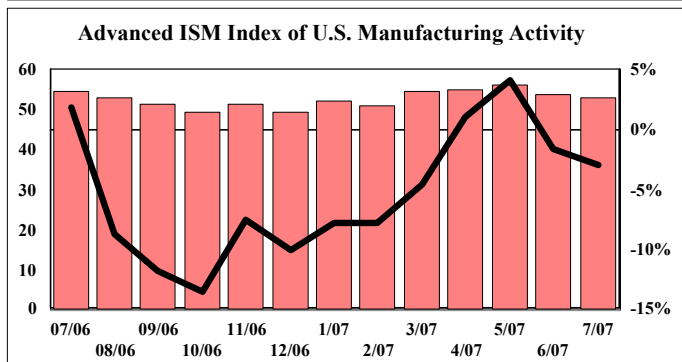
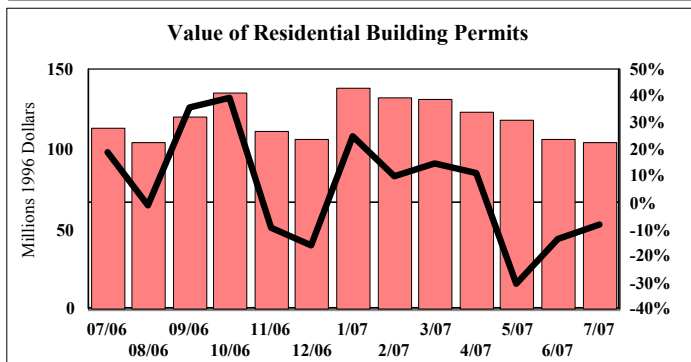
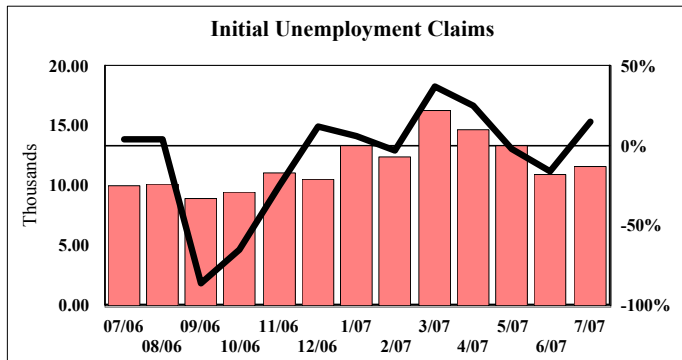
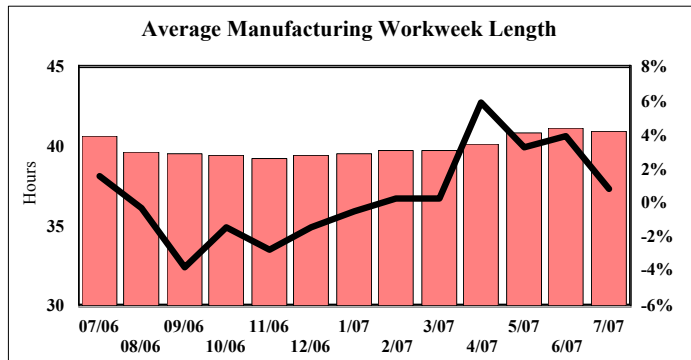
In Mississippi average manufacturing workweek length fell to 40.9 hours in July from the strong 41.3 hours observed in June. The series remains high by the standard of the past few years.

U.S. Economy

The U.S. coincident index rose 0.2 percent in July relative to June. The index was 1.1 percent above the January 2007 level, a 2.1 percent annual rate. This is below the 2.5 percent growth observed in 2006. The U.S. leading index rose 0.4 percent in July offsetting the decline in June. The series is up an annualized 0.3 percent between January and July -- essentially flat. The Conference Board anticipates the economy will grow at a slow pace in the near term.

Due to the threat of recession brought on by the mortgage problems, the Fed lowered the Federal Funds Rate 0.5 percent to 4.75 percent on September 18th. This was the first decline since June 2003. The decline is expected to give relief to some adjustable rate mortgage (ARM) holders who were about to reset their interest rate. Many ARM's are tied to one-year treasuries which tend to move in the same direction as the Federal Funds Rate. Consumers also benefit with lower rates on such debt as credit cards, home equity loans and auto loans. Perhaps more importantly the action signals the markets that the Fed will act decisively to forestall adverse economic conditions. This will help both consumer and business confidence.

Mississippi Index of Leading Indicator Components



NOTE:

The bar graphs above represent the seasonally adjusted monthly series and correspond to the left-hand axis. The line graph represents the growth rate over the prior year's value and corresponds to the right-hand axis.

SOURCES:

- Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Bureau of the Census.
- The Conference Board.
- The Institute for Supply Management.

Quips and Quotes:

*“If we knew what we were doing,
it would not be called research, would it?”*

-- Albert Einstein

SELECTED MISSISSIPPI ECONOMIC INDICATORS

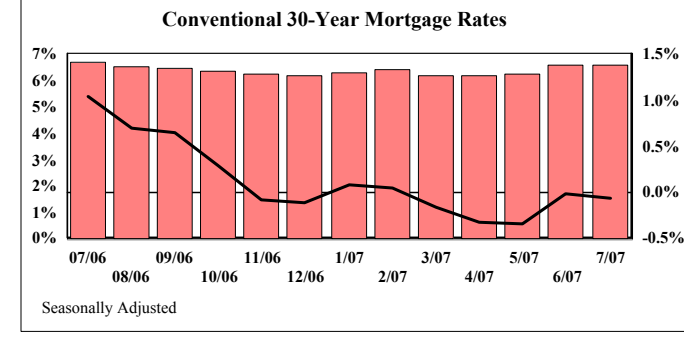
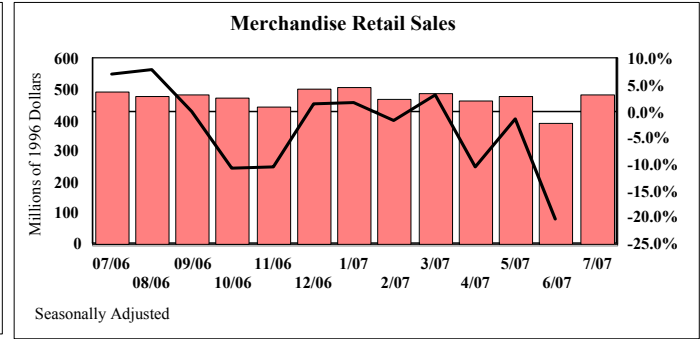
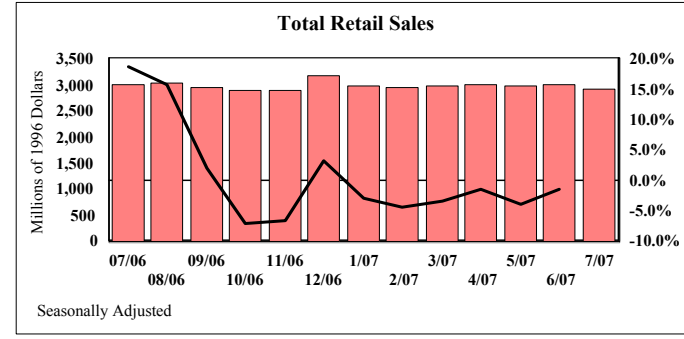
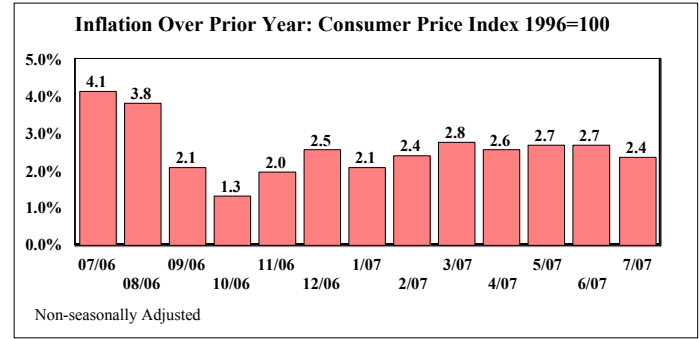
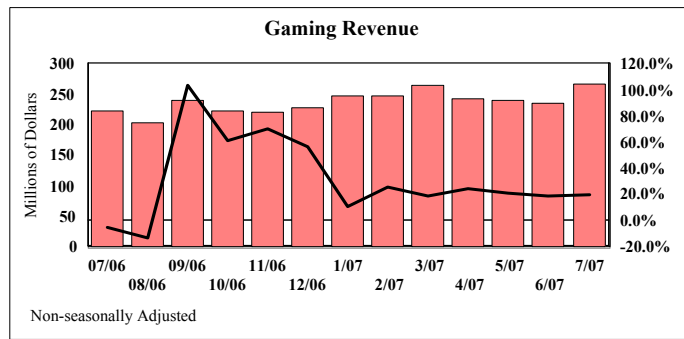
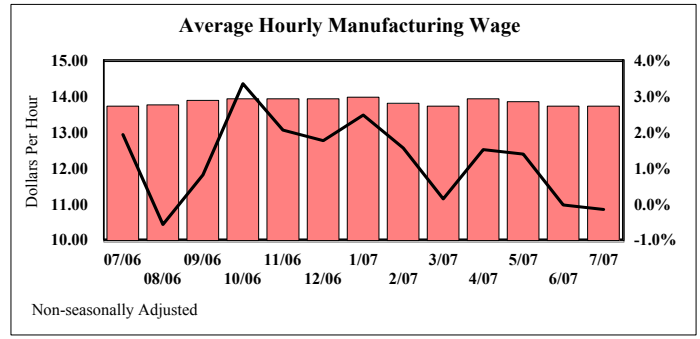
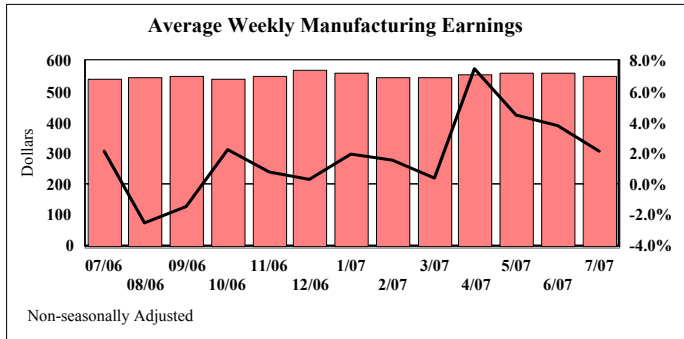
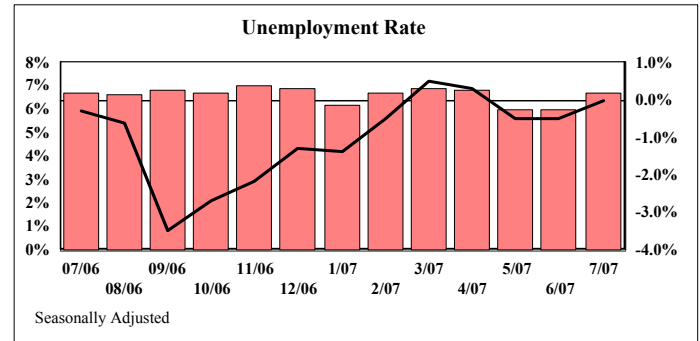
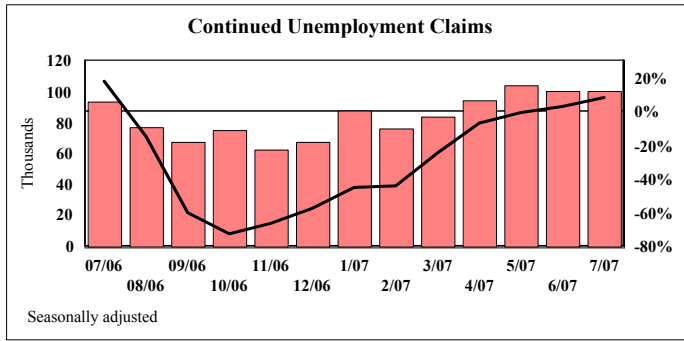
	July 2007	June 2007	July 2006	Percent Change From Last Month Last Year	
Coincident Indicator Index	108.2	107.8	105.8	0.4%	2.3%
Nonagricultural Employment (thousands)	1,160.6	1,157.9	1,133.5	0.2%	2.4%
Individual Income Tax Withholdings (millions of 1996 \$)	89.2	86.4	89.2	3.2%	0.0%
Leading Indicator Index	105.1	104.8	104.5	0.3%	0.6%
Initial Unemployment Claims	11,550	10,986	10,059	5.1%	14.8%
Value of Residential Building Permits (millions of 1996 \$)	104.1	106.4	113.5	-2.2%	-8.4%
Average Manufacturing Workweek Length (hours)	40.9	41.1	40.6	-0.4%	0.8%
Advanced ISM Index of U.S. Manufacturing Activity Index is advanced one month. Thus the August index is reported for July.	52.9	53.8	54.5	-1.7%	-2.9%
U.S. Index of Consumer Expectations	81.5	74.7	72.5	9.1%	12.4%
Miscellaneous					
Consumer Price Index U.S. (1996=100)	132.8	132.8	129.7	-0.0%	2.4%
Unemployment Rate (percentage)					
Non-seasonally adjusted	7.2%	6.9%	7.5%	0.3%	-0.3%
Seasonally adjusted	6.7%	6.0%	6.7%	0.7%	0.0%
Continued Unemployment Claims	100,548	99,926	92,997	0.6%	8.1%
Average Manufacturing Wage (Non-seasonally adjusted)					
Current Dollars per Hour	13.72	13.73	13.74	-0.1%	-0.1%
1996 Dollars per Hour	10.33	10.34	10.59	-0.0%	-2.4%
Average Weekly Manufacturing Earnings (Non-seasonally adjusted)					
Current Dollars	550.17	560.18	538.61	-1.8%	2.1%
1996 Dollars	414.28	421.71	415.14	-1.8%	-0.2%
U.S. Mortgage Rates (30-year conventional)	6.6%	6.6%	6.7%	0.0%	-0.1%
Gaming Revenues (Non-seasonally adjusted)					
Coast counties (millions of current \$)	122.4	107.7	74.6	13.6%	64.0%
River counties (millions of current \$)	143.8	128.2	148.2	12.1%	-3.0%
Total	266.2	235.9	222.9	12.8%	19.4%

Note: The data are seasonally adjusted unless otherwise noted.

Unless otherwise noted all data refer to Mississippi.

NA = Not available

Miscellaneous Economic Indicators



NOTE:
The bar graphs above represent the monthly series and correspond to the left-hand axis. The line graphs represents the growth rate over the prior year's value and correspond to the right-hand axis.

SOURCES:
Mississippi Employment Security Commission.
Mississippi State Tax Commission.
Mississippi Gaming Commission.
Federal Home Mortgage Corporation.
Bureau of Labor Statistics.

DISABILITY IN MISSISSIPPI

By Barbara J. Logue, Ph.D.

Chronic health problems may result from disease, accidents, violence, or congenital abnormalities. They affect every aspect of life – from one's ability to get an education and to move about independently to his/her ability to earn a living. Census 2000 collected a variety of data on disability for individuals in Mississippi. All of the disability questions focused on long-lasting problems – six months or longer – rather than short-lived conditions like a broken arm or sprained ankle.

The six areas of disability addressed in the census are as follows: (1) *sensory* disability refers to whether the person is deaf or blind, or has a severe vision or hearing impairment; (2) *physical* disability consists of any condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities, such as walking or climbing stairs; (3) *mental* disability is defined as difficulty in learning, remembering, or concentrating; (4) *self-care* disability is present if the individual has difficulty dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home; (5) *going outside alone* disability implies a need for assistance with such everyday activities as grocery shopping or a trip to the dentist; and (6) *employment* disability refers to difficulties in working at a job or business. The last two questions were addressed only to people aged 16 and over.

Since the disability measures are not mutually exclusive, it is possible for any given individual to experience two or more disabilities simultaneously. For instance, a person with a physical disability might be unable to hold down a job because of it, and thus also report an employment disability.

Disability Prevalence in Mississippi

Mississippi is tied with Arkansas for the third highest overall disability rate in the nation, at 23.6 percent in 2000. Only West Virginia and Kentucky reported slightly higher rates. The states with the highest overall disability rates also tend to have comparatively high rates on the individual measures, such as employment disability and sensory disability.¹

The Census Bureau has reported percentages disabled for the civilian noninstitutionalized population in Mississippi and the nation. The data exclude children under 5 and people serving in the armed forces, as well as those living in institutions (who tend to be highly disabled). As Table 1 indicates, the percentage with any disability in the state exceeds the national average – 23.6 percent versus 19.3 percent.

When it comes to specific types of disability, prevalence for state residents is greater on every measure than for their national counterparts. Among Mississippians aged 16 and over, for example, about one in nine has difficulty going outside the home without assistance, compared to about one in twelve nationwide. For people in the working ages (16 to 64), proportionally more Mississippians reported an employment disability.

Mississippians are also relatively disadvantaged on the percentage suffering from a combination of two or more disabilities. Whereas 12.2 percent of state residents aged 5 and over had two or more disabilities, the national figure was 9.0 percent.

When substantial fractions of the population suffer from long-term disability, the state experiences a variety of negative impacts. First, previous research in Mississippi shows that chronic disability early in life limits educational attainment. Further, among people not disabled in childhood, the less educated are more likely to become disabled as adults. In part, this is because the jobs they tend to hold are riskier and more physically demanding – construction laborers, for example – and thus more hazardous to health. Learning deficiencies may also be associated with less awareness of safety precautions or lower compliance, raising the risk of occupational injuries.²

Second, disability limits the size of the work force, to the extent that the disabled are prevented from working or unable to find work suited to their capacities. Among Mississippians aged 21 to 64 in 2000, for

Table 1.

DISABILITY STATUS AND TYPE OF DISABILITY FOR CIVILIAN NONINSTITUTIONALIZED POPULATION, AGES 5 AND OVER, MISSISSIPPI AND UNITED STATES, 2000

Ages 5+	Mississippi (%)	U.S. (%)
No disability	76.4	80.7
Any disability	23.6	19.3
Sensory	4.8	3.6
Mental	11.3	8.2
Self-care	6.4	4.8
	3.8	2.6
Two or more disabilities	12.2	9.0
Ages 16+		
Going outside alone	11.1	8.6
Ages 16-64		
Employment disability	14.4	11.9

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000*.

example, less than half (49.1 percent) of those with a disability were employed, compared to three out of four (74.3 percent) nondisabled people in that age group. Economic growth suffers when jobs go unfilled or productivity lags due to workers' ill health.

Third, disabled people who cannot work or who only work part-time increase the state's dependency burden, since those who do work must support those who don't. Not surprisingly, the disabled are more likely than the nondisabled to live in poverty and to receive government benefits such as housing subsidies and food stamps.³

Fourth, the combination of more dependents and fewer workers makes it difficult to raise per capita income and reduces the state tax collections that finance social programs, infrastructure development, and many other needs.

Fifth, high disability rates means high medical costs. To the extent that these are paid with state funds, monies are again diverted from other pressing needs, such as schools and transportation systems. Finally, some people are so disabled that they require

institutionalization, an expensive alternative that few families can afford. Highly disabled people who live at home typically rely on the unpaid assistance of relatives. Such caregivers may have to quit their jobs outright, cut their work hours, or refuse transfers or promotions which might entail moving, in order to provide the necessary care.⁴ Employees' elder care duties alone cost employers an estimated \$29 billion dollars annually in lost productivity.⁵

Causes and Remedies

Disability problems may begin before birth, due to congenital malformations, inherited diseases, lack of prenatal care, mother's poor nutrition or her use of tobacco or illicit drugs. "Genetic disorders and birth defects result in enormous financial consequences to individual families and the state as a whole."⁶ Because many families cannot afford the necessary care services, public programs must step in. In FY 2000 alone, the bills in Mississippi exceeded \$41 million in combined state and federal funds; in addition to diagnostic and treatment services, this figure includes Social Security benefits for children with disabilities.⁷ According to the Mississippi Department of Education's Office of Special Education, special

education services in the same year were provided to over 66,000 children aged 3 to 21, who suffered from disabilities ranging from learning deficits to “severe and profound developmental disabilities.”⁸

Among the fifty states, Mississippi ranks at or near the top in the percentage of babies born with low birthweight. In 2003 (the most recent year available), 11.4 percent of births in the state were low birthweight, compared to 7.9 percent at the national level.⁹ Low birthweight refers to babies who weigh less than 5.5 pounds at birth; the main cause of low birthweight is prematurity, referring to an infant born before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy. Low birthweight babies face a higher than average risk of lasting disabilities such as mental retardation, learning problems, cerebral palsy, and vision and hearing loss.¹⁰ About one in four babies born prematurely “suffer significant long-term neurodevelopmental problems.”¹¹

Mississippi's high teen birth rate – consistently the highest in the nation – is one of the reasons for the state's high incidence of prematurity and low birthweight; other explanations include chronic health problems in the mother, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, smoking, and use of illicit drugs, poverty, lack of education, and inadequate prenatal care.¹² Reductions in the teen birth rate, adequate prenatal care, and lifestyle improvements by potential mothers can prevent many child disability problems.

Mississippi reports the highest rates of overweight and obesity in the nation, creating “one of the state's most pressing public health problems,” and constituting the main reasons for an increasing rate of diabetes here, according to the *2007 State Health Plan*. Overweight children, especially the growing numbers with diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure, face a much higher risk of heart disease and stroke by the time they reach their 30s and 40s.¹³ A high, and rising, prevalence of hypertension makes Mississippi one of eleven states known as the “Stroke Belt.”¹⁴

Accidents are another cause of long-term disability.

“Despite evidence that almost all injuries are preventable, they constitute one of the most tragic and costly public health problems to date.”¹⁵ Use of seatbelts, improved driver training, better enforcement of traffic laws, installation of smoke detectors in homes, and other forms of prevention can reduce disabilities from accidents. However, according to a 2007 report by the Life and Health Insurance Foundation for Education, the primary cause of disability is not accidents, whether work-related or not, but chronic diseases like cancer and cardiovascular problems.¹⁶

The unhealthy lifestyles that precipitate many chronic conditions, such as heart disease, are one explanation for a rising rate of disability in the work place. Since disability prevalence rises dramatically with age, the fact that our work force is aging also helps explain rises in disability among the working age population. Another factor is improved treatments for diseases that, while they help people to live longer, also leave them disabled.¹⁷ Rising disability claims, in combination with expected labor shortages as the population ages, suggest that more and more work place accommodations will be needed in years to come if productivity is not to suffer.¹⁸ According to the Social Security Administration, the nation already has a record backlog of appeals by people claiming to be too disabled to work, and that record number is growing rapidly.¹⁹

Vocational rehabilitation can help many sick or injured workers return to productive employment.²⁰ But, despite the fact that “there is virtually universal agreement that such programs return far more money to society than they cost,” there are not nearly enough programs to meet the pressing need for them.²¹

Like most accidents, much chronic disease is preventable. Excess weight, for example, often leads to such health problems as cardiovascular disease, arthritis, and diabetes. Together, these three conditions are “estimated to cost employers more than \$220 billion annually in medical care and lost productivity.”²² Clearly, these are problems that can be avoided with exercise and a proper diet. Tobacco use, a prime

suspect in many cancer cases, can be avoided or stopped if a person is so motivated. The same is true for the use of alcohol and illicit drugs – contributors to many motor vehicle and other accidents, as well as violent crimes.

Conclusion

For those concerned with Mississippi's perennial poor showing on measures of economic well-being, the state's burden of long-term disability is certainly a key part of the explanation. Because we are an aging population, and because disability rates rise with age, the number of chronically disabled Mississippians is likely to increase in coming years. The improved survival prospects of even the severely disabled, due to advances in medicine, will raise those numbers even further.

By definition, chronic health problems are incurable. Hence, vocational rehabilitation, early retirement, and coping mechanisms in the home and in the work place are the only alternatives. But, among people still in

good health, prevention efforts can keep future increases in the disabled population to a minimum. Screening programs, disease and accident prevention programs, and early treatment of such problems as overweight and hypertension can prevent or postpone worse problems, such as stroke and heart disease. Individuals can do much, at little or no monetary cost, to invest in their own and their family's health by eating better, avoiding tobacco, and exercising regularly. In the workplace, businesses and industry can enhance safety programs, maintain equipment, educate workers to minimize accidents on the job, and offer healthy choices in the cafeteria. Since increasing educational attainment is associated with lower disability rates, increasing state investments in education will pay off in health terms as well as in work force productivity.²³ With concerted effort, such steps can simultaneously reduce the need for expensive medical services, use scarce resources more efficiently, create a healthier work force, and enhance the quality of life in Mississippi.

Notes

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2. Barbara J. Logue, "Education and Health," *Mississippi's Business*, Vol. 61, No. 4, April, 2003.
3. Erika Steinmetz, "Americans with Disabilities: 2002," *Current Population Reports/Household Economic Studies*, P70-107, May, 2006, p. 8.
4. Sue Shellenbarger, "The Secret Wild Card: Employees Want Jobs That Help Caregivers," *Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2000.
5. _____, "Taking Care of Parents: New High-Tech Links Can Offer Some Relief," *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2000.
6. Mississippi State Department of Health, Bureau of Child Health, Division of Genetic Services and Institute for Disability Studies, University of Southern Mississippi, "Planning for Genetic Services in Mississippi," February, 2003, p. 4.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 6.
9. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007* (Washington, D.C., 2006), p. 68.
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GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

By Debra Anderson

"We can praise the virtues of parental involvement all day, but until we actually get parents to follow through we are simply singing to an empty music hall. Voluntary programs will not get the job done."

- Gov. Mitt Romney, Massachusetts

2004 press release

One of the most frequently identified recommendations for improving public schools is Parental Involvement. Studies have shown that when used in the highest and best way, parental involvement improves morale, attitudes, and academic achievement. By getting involved, parents reduce the risk of academic failure and children dropping out before graduation.

"Research shows that parental involvement in a child's education is a strong predictor of student achievement: typically, the more involved the parent, the better off the child."¹ Parental involvement has also been shown to help with issues of discipline, absenteeism and tardiness.

"Research carried out by Feinstein and Symon in 1999 found that children of parents showing high levels of interest in their schooling can progress between 15-17% more in math and reading between ages of 11 and 16 as compared to pupils whose parents showed no interest."²

While parental involvement seems to a significant part of the answer of better academic performance of school children, and few will dispute findings that extol its virtues, voluntary programs and simple encouragement have not produced needed results.

Two questions need to be answered:

1. Why aren't parents involved?
2. What must be done to get parents involved?

Parental involvement has not reached the required levels to turn the tide of academic performance in public schools. One reason is because *parental involvement* is a nebulous term. It means different things to different people

According to the *Child Trends DataBank*, parental involvement in schools, as measured by attendance at a general meeting, a meeting with the teacher or school event and by volunteering or serving on a committee, rose significantly between 1999 and 2003.³

However, levels of involvement are still impacted by differences in race and ethnicity, parental education and poverty level. Hispanic and non-Hispanic black students were less likely to have parents who attended school events or who volunteered their time compared with non-Hispanic white students. Sixty one percent of Hispanic students and 63 percent of black students had parents who attended events, while 74 percent of white students had parents who had done so.⁴

It is likely that some parents don't know how to get involved or are uncertain about what they need to do to become involved. Others are dealing with time constraints, while some are simply not interested enough to be involved.

Barriers to parental involvement must be eliminated as much as possible because it [parental involvement] is too important to be "optional." If confusion or uncertainty is a barrier, parents need to be clear on what they need to do. If necessary, they must be shown specific, practical ways to help their children academically, in the home.

This might include developing structure and routines and creating an environment at home that is conducive to learning. Perhaps parents need to be shown how to do this. Parents need to be clearly aware of what basic knowledge is required of their children in order

for them to keep up and advance. If necessary, parents must be trained in practical ways of what they need to do to assist with homework and reinforce what is being taught in school to support teacher efforts.

The Massachusetts *Legacy of Learning* initiative requires parents of students typically found to be at risk, to take parental preparation courses and makes parental involvement mandatory for them.

Mississippi public schools that suffer from low parental involvement need to help parents understand and establish achievable education goals for their

children. Schools need to develop a mechanism for training parents in practical ways to help their children reach set goals.

If parental involvement is a key factor that impacts in the quality of education, as studies have shown, we must place serious, consistent, and practical solutions for tackling the issue. Addressing this issue will probably prove to be tedious-even painstaking at first, but quite necessary. The social, economic and cultural spin-off of a strong public education system made up of parents and students who truly value education is immeasurable.

Notes

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