



# Consumer News & Views

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN CONSUMER COUNCIL



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## Consumer Confidence Deteriorates in June



The Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index® deteriorated by 5.4 points in June, falling to 93.0 (1985=100) from 98.4 in May.

Consumer confidence weakened in June, erasing almost half of May's sharp gains.

- The decline was broad-based across components, with consumers' assessments of the present situation and their expectations for the future both contributing to the deterioration.
- Consumers were less positive about current business conditions than May.
- Consumers were more pessimistic about business conditions and job availability over the next six months
- Tariffs remained on top of consumers' minds and were frequently associated with concerns about their negative impacts on the economy and prices.
- Inflation and high prices were another important concern cited by consumers in June.
- Purchasing plans for cars were steady at the highest level since December 2024, while purchasing plans for homes declined.

**The Present Situation Index**—based on consumers' assessment of current business and labor market conditions—fell 6.4 points to 129.1.

**The Expectations Index**—based on consumers' short-term outlook for income, business, and labor market conditions—fell 4.6 points to 69.0, substantially below the threshold of 80 that typically signals a recession ahead.

## *Big Beautiful Bill--And how it can hurt Americans*



As lawmakers in Washington debate the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, several studies have found that its repeal of tax credits for renewable energy and large batteries will cost jobs and increase consumer costs for electricity.

The U.S. Senate could begin voting on the sweeping budget reconciliation bill as soon as Friday. The legislation is stuffed with Republican priorities, including cuts to Medicaid and extending 2017 tax cuts.

It also includes a rollback of renewable energy tax incentives that were part of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, which many credit the climate change-centric bill for jumpstarting a solar and battery storage boom in Texas.

That rise might not end, but the sudden removal of renewable tax credits makes them more expensive. The Senate's version of the bill calls for phasing out those credits over the next year, though some experts say it would more likely be a sudden drop because of provisions regarding how solar, wind and batteries source their components from foreign nations.

"The issue is that they will cost more, and so you're going to see power prices go up for consumers like you and me, and you'll also see them go up for commercial businesses and for industry," said Dan O'Brien, a senior analyst at the Washington-based, non-partisan think tank Energy Innovation Policy & Technology.

Energy Innovation Policy & Technology – or EI – recently studied the effects of ending the Inflation Reduction Act tax credits for renewable energy. It found the average Texas household would pay \$320 more for electricity in 2030 and \$780 more in 2035.

Similar increases in consumer spending on electricity were projected by the Clean Energy Buyers Association, which found households would see electric bills rise by \$275 in 2029.

Both studies also predicted job losses and a hit to the state's overall economic health.

"You kind of get a double whammy of higher prices here and also fewer jobs," O'Brien said. "So people who are struggling with energy prices are losing their jobs at the same time, it could be a rough hit."

The Senate's version of the budget reconciliation act preserves tax credits for other energy sources, including nuclear power and geothermal power. However, those sources of clean energy remain years away from producing the amount of energy needed to meet projections of steep power demand increases fueled by the growing number of data centers in Texas and the nation.

"We're just not building that much of those [other energy sources] over the next five years," said Rich Powell, CEO of the Clean Energy Buyers Association.

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In Texas, the elimination of renewable tax credits will likely be greeted warmly by the state’s Republican lawmakers. Since their inception, lawmakers have sought to offset their impact by creating incentives for natural gas-fueled power plants, including a \$10 billion energy fund to give low-interest loans and grants to the builders of those power plants.

However, that program has faced setbacks, which led state lawmakers to pass legislation relaxing its deadlines amid a worldwide shortage of critical components needed to complete those plants, including years-long backlogs of natural gas turbines.

That means the development of renewable energy and batteries will continue, but just not at the breakneck pace that saw batteries’ capacity in Texas jump 400% in two years and solar power’s generating capacity double.

The Big Beautiful Bill also phases out manufacturing tax credits that will create setbacks in the domestic supply of battery and solar power components, O’Brien said. That could also affect power transmission equipment as well, including transformers, cables and other equipment.

“It’s going to lead to a lot of cancellations of projects,” he said.

Amid uncertainty over the tax credits, the business group E2 estimates that \$15.5 billion in nationwide investment was cancelled since January, leading to a loss of 12,000 jobs.

The Clean Energy Buyers Association estimates that Texas would see a negative impact of \$5.6 billion on the states economy, while EI projected an \$8.5 billion hit to the states gross domestic product in 2030.



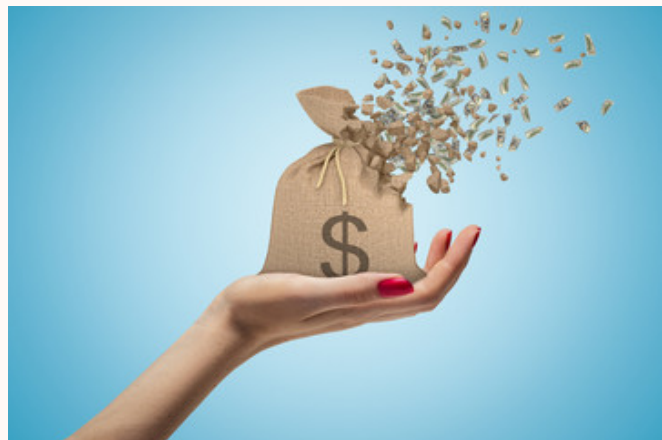
About 82% of IRA investments occurred in Republican-held Congressional districts. Likewise, 72% of IRA jobs were created in Republican districts, according to E2.

While some Republicans are fighting to keep the renewable tax credits alive, few, if any are in Texas. Sen. John Cornyn, who sits on the Senate’s finance committee, called the IRA tax incentives a “financial boondoggle,” but said repealing the tax credits should not be extended to projects that have already begun construction.

Renewable energy “depends on the federal government subsidizing a lot of this activity,” Cornyn told The Morning News. “At some point, we have to pay attention to the fact that we’ve got approaching a \$37 trillion debt, which is an existential threat to our country.”

Arlo Nichols, a Corpus Christi technician who services wind turbines, said the clean energy industry has provided him a well-paying career – one he didn’t expect to achieve as a high school dropout.

“It really angers me when I see Congress voting on a bill that they didn’t even read that could drastically reduce our career choices in the future and slow down the growth of this industry, Nichols said during a news conference on the repeal of IRA credits. “Honestly, it makes me really angry.”



## *War Anxiety is Real--How to cope*



As global conflict once again dominates the headlines, anxiety is creeping in for Americans at home—even those with no direct ties to the military. Experts say that fear of war is very real and knowing how to manage it is critical for mental well-being.

“Fear of war is a normal response — particularly because of recent events,” said Dr. Josh Klapow, a clinical psychologist based in Alabama. “The U.S. is actively involved now. Does that mean we are in direct danger? I don’t know. But shifting from things being over there with them—to being over there with us—even if we don’t have a military connection, we’re citizens of this nation. And that alone can be triggering.”

In recent weeks, concerns over potential escalation and military action have triggered memories of past global conflicts. The result? A spike in what psychologists refer to as “anticipatory anxiety” — fear of something that hasn’t happened yet, but feels close.

“It’s important to separate the difference between how we feel and what we know to be true,” Klapow explained. “We can read, we can try to absorb information, but we also have to recognize that our emotions may be stronger than the information that we have. And that is normal.”

For those feeling overwhelmed, Klapow said the goal isn’t to eliminate fear, but to manage it in a way that still allows for day-to-day functioning.

“If I feel nervous and anxious and I can’t carry out my job, then things like stepping away from the news a little bit, doing some deep breathing exercises, distracting yourself—these are things everybody’s heard, but they work,” he said. “The idea is not to not be informed. It’s to bring that anxiety down to a level that allows you to do what you need to do in your day-to-day life.”

That distinction, between staying informed and staying well, is where many people struggle. In an age of constant notifications and streaming updates, taking a break from the news can feel like turning your back on the world.

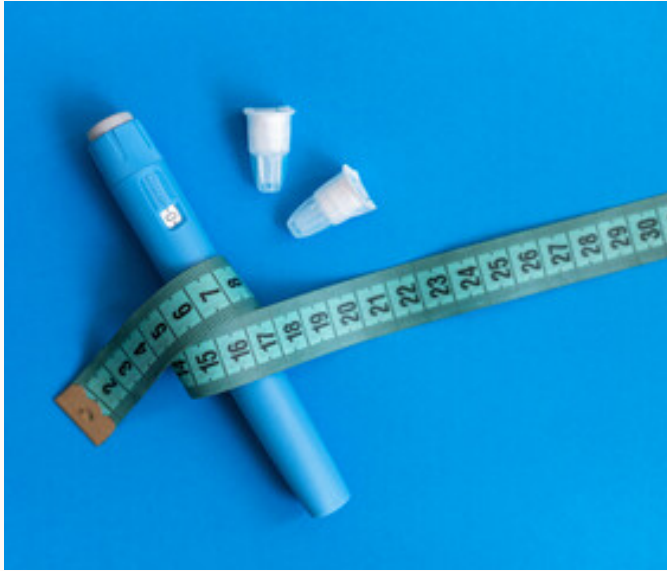
“You have to make a judgment call—do I need to know more, or is knowing more creating more stress, more of a negative impact on my mental health?” Klapow said. “Sleeping relatively calm with a little bit of nervousness is a much healthier approach than consuming so much information that we’re not able to function well in life.”

And for those with a history of anxiety, trauma, or post-traumatic stress disorder, the recent flood of war coverage can be especially triggering. Klapow encourages those individuals to speak up.

“There’s going to be a small percentage of people for whom this kind of information is incredibly triggering—potentially veterans, or people with existing anxiety conditions,” he said. “If you’re talking to your mental health professional, go back and let them know. The mental health professional community is ready for this. We know that this happens, and we’re here to support people.”

His message for anyone struggling right now? You don’t have to pretend everything’s fine. And you don’t have to go through it alone.

## Are Weight Loss Drugs Really Safe?



GLP-1 agonists like Wegovy, Ozempic, and Mounjaro might benefit heart and brain health—but research suggests they might also cause pregnancy complications and harm some users.

Weight-loss drugs are this decade's blockbuster medicines. Drugs like Ozempic, Wegovy, and Mounjaro help people with diabetes get their blood sugar under control and help overweight and obese people reach a healthier weight. And they're fast becoming a trendy must-have for celebrities and other figure-conscious individuals looking to trim down.

They became so hugely popular so quickly that not long after their approval for weight loss, we saw global shortages of the drugs. Prescriptions have soared over the last five years, but even people who don't have prescriptions are seeking these drugs out online. A 2024 health tracking poll by KFF found that around 1 in 8 US adults said they had taken one.

We know they can suppress appetite, lower blood sugar, and lead to dramatic weight loss. We also know that they come with side effects, which can include nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting. But we are still learning about some of their other effects.

On the one hand, these seemingly miraculous drugs appear to improve health in other ways, helping to protect against heart failure, kidney disease, and potentially even substance-use disorders, neurodegenerative diseases, and cancer.

But on the other, they appear to be harmful to some people. Their use has been linked to serious conditions, pregnancy complications, and even some deaths. This week let's take a look at what weight-loss drugs can do.

Ozempic, Wegovy, and other similar drugs are known as GLP-1 agonists; they mimic a chemical made in the intestine, GLP-1, that increases insulin and lowers blood levels of glucose. Originally developed to treat diabetes, they are now known to be phenomenal at suppressing appetite. One key trial, published in 2015, found that over the course of around a year, people who took one particular drug lost between around 4.7% and 6% of their body weight, depending on the dose they took.

Newer versions of that drug were shown to have even bigger effects. A 2021 trial of semaglutide—the active ingredient in both Ozempic and Wegovy—found that people who took it for 68 weeks lost around 15% of their body weight—equivalent to around 15 kilograms.

But there appear to be other benefits, too. In 2024, an enormous study that included 17,604 people in 41 countries found that semaglutide appeared to reduce heart failure in people who were overweight or obese and had cardiovascular disease. That same year, the US approved Wegovy to “reduce the risk of cardiovascular death, heart attack, and stroke in [overweight] adults with cardiovascular disease.” This year, Ozempic was approved to reduce the risk of kidney disease.

And it doesn't end there. The many users of GLP-1 agonists have been reporting some unexpected positive side effects. Not only are they less interested in food, but they are less interested in alcohol, tobacco, opioids, and other addictive substances.

Research suggests they might protect men from prostate cancer. They might help treat osteoarthritis. Some scientists think the drugs could be used to treat a range of pain conditions, and potentially help people with migraine. And some even seem to protect brain cells from damage in lab studies, and they are being explored as potential treatments for neurological disorders like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's (although we don't yet have any evidence they can be useful here).

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The more we learn about GLP-1 agonists, the more miraculous they seem to be. What can't they do?! you might wonder. Unfortunately, like any drug, GLP-1 agonists carry safety warnings. They can often cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, and their use has also been linked to inflammation of the pancreas—a condition that can be fatal. They increase the risk of gall bladder disease.

There are other concerns. Weight-loss drugs can help people trim down on fat, but lean muscle can make up around 10% of the body weight lost by people taking them. That muscle is important, especially as we get older. Muscle loss can affect strength and mobility, and it also can also leave people more vulnerable to falls, which are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths worldwide, according to the World Health Organization.

And, as with most drugs, we don't fully understand the effects weight-loss drugs might have in pregnancy. That's important; even though the drugs are not recommended during pregnancy, health agencies point out that some people who take these drugs might be more likely to get pregnant, perhaps because they interfere with the effects of contraceptive drugs.

And we don't really know how they might affect the development of a fetus, if at all. A study published in January found that people who took the drugs either before or during pregnancy didn't seem to face increased risk of birth defects. But other research due to be presented at a conference in the coming days found that such individuals were more likely to experience obstetrical complications and preeclampsia.

So yes, while the drugs are incredibly helpful for many people, they are not for everyone. It might be fashionable to be thin, but it's not necessarily healthy. No drug comes without risks. Even one that 1 in 8 American adults have taken.



# *How to Improve Your Mood and Feel HAPPIER!*



In this day and age, something negative feels like it is always around the corner. How to combat that? Choose to be happy and to stay positive. Sometimes it can feel like leading a happier life is a dream rather than something attainable, especially if things aren't going your way. But it's possible to improve your mood if you follow the right habits--and they're habits that all of us can get into.

Our moods can be affected by everything around us, such as the weather, light levels, the food we eat and even how active we are. While it's unrealistic to expect to be in a great mood all the time, learning these daily habits can help foster a more positive mindset so that you're ready for those little setbacks life throws you.

If you want to pursue a happier life, try incorporating some of these ideas into your daily or weekly routine. The best part? All the habits on this list are absolutely free.

Simple mental health habits to start using today:

## **Make relaxation a routine**

Very few things in life are promised, but stressful times are all but guaranteed. There will be times when you feel overwhelmed or stressed out, but you can control how you respond to the strain. Implementing relaxation techniques into your daily routine can help you manage stress.

Meditation is a popular way to relax as it can help reach a state of calm, decrease stress and improve your mood. Some people even use music to guide them through their meditation sessions. If meditation isn't your thing, deep breathing, reading or taking a hot bath are also popular relaxation techniques. No matter how you choose to relax, try to make it a habit.

## **Practice gratitude**

Including gratitude in your life is a way to create a positive outlook on your life. More than that, it has tangible benefits for your mental health, including reducing stress, lessening depression symptoms and boosting your mood.

Gratitude is a simple concept but sometimes can be difficult to keep up with. Take time for self-reflection and share your gratitude with the people around you. If you like to journal, regularly write down a list of things you're grateful for.

## **Value social interaction**

Sharing our time with others is sometimes just what we need to boost our mood or change our perspective on things. By making time for friends and family, you will decrease feelings of loneliness and ensure you have an emotional support system at your fingertips. If you can't regularly meet in person, text messages and Zoom calls are all meaningful ways to connect with others without actually seeing each other.

The other side of valuing social interaction is knowing when you've had enough. Boundaries are an essential part of mental health that helps keep you from pushing yourself too far. Feel empowered to say no or move plans around when your body tells you to.



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Take care of your physical health  
Mental health is directly tied to physical health. One cannot flourish without the other. The three main areas to target are sleep, nutrition and exercise.

Let's dig into each target area:

- **Sleep:** The state of your mental health is influenced by the sleep you get. If you don't get enough sleep, your brain doesn't have the chance to rest and recover. Sleep deprivation makes it harder to regulate your emotions and cope with stress, which can amplify the symptoms of existing mental illnesses. Being intentional about prioritizing your sleep is a simple way to value your mental health.
- **Food and hydration:** Giving your body the nutrients and hydration it needs to function is another essential part of mental health. In addition to eating well-balanced meals, try adding foods to your diet that boost happiness. Make sure you drink enough water; hydration is linked to a decreased risk of anxiety and depression.
- **Exercise:** Being active is another way to boost your mood and make you feel good. Adding exercise to your routine gives you a chance to bond with others, reduce anxiety and boost your confidence. It doesn't have to be heavy lifting or intense workouts; regular walks or bike rides can also boost your mental health.

### Monitor your social media intake

Our phones are our lifelines. Most of the time, they're beside us, keeping us connected to the outside world through calls, texts and social media. The hours spent scrolling through social media, comparing ourselves to the snapshot of perfection people post, can seriously impact our self-view and stain our mental health. Constant social media use has been linked to worsened anxiety and depression symptoms, feelings of inadequacy and unhealthy sleeping habits.

You can use social media in a way that doesn't deplete your mental health. Use these tactics to make social media work for you:

- Don't start or end your day with social media.
- Put a limit on how long you can spend on social media.
- Use the time you used to spend on social media to do something that brings you joy or relaxation.

### Journal your feelings

Journaling is a powerful tool to cope with mental health disorders by working through emotions and channeling thoughts. A 2018 study found that journaling for 15 minutes each day significantly reduced stress and feelings of anxiety. Other research has linked it to helping work through PTSD symptoms or depression.

There is no right or wrong way to journal. Many people journal daily, others may journal only when stressed or need to work through something. No matter how you use it, journaling is a way you can track your progress and growth throughout the year.

### Make yourself laugh

Sometimes, laughter is the best medicine. When you're feeling stressed or down, do things that will make you laugh to reduce anxiety and stress. Watch your favorite TV show or movie to give your mood a boost or find the source within yourself. Sing while you're in the shower or dance while cleaning your home. Dancing reduces the stress hormone cortisol in the body.

Improving your mental health is a journey. It doesn't happen overnight. You can make lasting tweaks to your well-being by intentionally adding habits to your routine.





## *Life Insurance Facts You Probably Didn't Know*

While life insurance sales have risen since the COVID-19 pandemic, only about half of American adults have life insurance and many of those that do have policies still don't have enough coverage. Top retirement planning specialists think retirees underutilize life insurance. During seminars, they ask how many people let their life insurance go because the kids have grown up. Always, the hands go up.

After he explains the possible uses of life insurance as both a retirement and legacy planning tool, he finds attendees often regret this decision. If you don't have coverage or you let your former policy lapse, coverage still could be an option. The industry has made it easier to qualify for life insurance even with health conditions.

With that being said, life insurance can be a sizable investment, especially since costs go up as you get older. It's fair to question whether insurance premiums are the best use of your retirement budget. If you're wondering whether life insurance still makes sense for your financial plan, here's what to know.

### **There are different types**

Life insurance falls into two broad categories: term policies and permanent life insurance. Both follow the same general approach: You pay a premium and then, if you pass away while covered, your heirs receive the listed death benefit. However, term policies have a set expiration date. You may be able to renew, but the premiums get substantially more expensive each time and the insurer could set an age limit for renewals.

Permanent life insurance, on the other hand, does not expire provided you keep paying the premiums. Premiums start out much higher than for term policies but then do not go up as quickly as you get older. Many permanent policies charge the same premium the entire time. It is also possible to buy a permanent policy with a single, large premium payment.



There are also different types of permanent life insurance with different features. Whole life insurance charges the same premium each year. Universal life lets you adjust annual premiums, provided they add up to be enough to cover the ongoing insurance costs. Variable life combines investment products with life insurance, and your premium and death benefit depend on the investment performance. There are also products that combine multiple features, like variable universal life.

For retirement insurance needs like covering final expenses and leaving an inheritance, permanent policies can make more sense. Term is useful when you're young, can't afford permanent and have temporary needs. Because the years of coverage are limited, roughly 98% of term life policies don't pay a death claim, so there's usually nothing for your family.

### **Life insurance can build savings**

Permanent life insurance policies can build cash value from your premiums. This is money you can take out while alive, either as a withdrawal or as a loan that can be paid back. The cash value earns a return, based on the type of permanent policy. Whole life insurance grows by a fixed interest rate. Insurers have since created more complex, market-based insurance policies. "Today's products are not your grandfather's insurance solutions," says Derek Miser, president of Miser Wealth, a family office advisory firm in Knoxville, Tenn. For example, indexed universal life insurance policies earn a return based on a market index, like the S&P 500, with a floor to protect your balance against losses.

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While these newer products can potentially earn more than simpler policies like whole life, it depends on how well your investments perform. Annual fees are higher too. If you cancel within a decade or even longer of buying, these policies could charge a penalty against your cash balance.

**Tax laws are favorable for growth**

As long as you keep the cash value in your life insurance policy, you delay taxes on your gains. If you withdraw your cash value, you owe income tax on your gains. Alternatively, if you take money out as a loan, you won't owe income tax. However, the insurer charges interest and adds that to your outstanding loan balance until you repay it in full. The outstanding loan could also reduce your cash value growth because you have less money in the policy, though this depends on the insurer. Taking money out of your policy via withdrawal or loan reduces the death benefit for your heirs.

Miser points out that you don't have to pay loans back during your lifetime; loans can be paid off from the death benefit. This stream of nontaxable income can help you avoid IRMAA surcharges on Medicare or taxes on Social Security, which you pay when your taxable income for the year is above thresholds set by the IRS.

**Investment fees can be high**

Fees are a drawback to saving through life insurance cash value, especially on market-based variable products. Not only do you pay life insurance premiums, but the insurer could also deduct annual fees up to 3% for the underlying investments. Similar mutual funds would charge 1% at the high end and often much less.

If you can still contribute to a 401(k) or IRA, that likely would be the better long-term investment given those accounts also have tax benefits. Compared to a brokerage account where you owe taxes each year though, cash value life insurance can be more competitive, especially if you also want the insurance coverage.

**You can combine life insurance with long-term care coverage**

Some life insurance policies allow you to spend part or all the death benefit on long-term care. "With this setup, you either receive the money for long-term care or your heirs receive the death benefit," says Paul LaPiana, head of brand, product, and affiliated distribution for MassMutual. "It's use-it-or-lose-it versus the use-it-or-lose-it set up of long-term care insurance," which won't pay anything if you pass away without needing care. Caveat: If you need prolonged care, traditional long-term care insurance likely would pay more.

**Insurance can make it easier to budget your other savings**

Miser of Miser Wealth finds that retirees are often scared to spend their savings in retirement, especially if they're married and don't want their spouse to run out of money. He suggests using part of your retirement income or assets to set up a policy, with the idea that when you pass away, it replenishes your spouse's savings. That way you can spend the rest of your money a little more freely.

**It's a more effective inheritance than some other assets**

When your heirs inherit pre-tax money in a retirement account, like a 401(k) or traditional IRA, they'll owe income tax when they take the money out. Most non-spouse heirs must withdraw everything within 10 years of the inheritance. Depending on how much is in the account, that restriction can result in a substantial chunk of their inheritance going toward taxes.

As an alternative, LaPiana suggests using some of your retirement assets or income to fund a life insurance policy. "Your heirs receive the death benefit income and capital gains tax-free." While estate taxes could apply, they kick in at the federal level only if you pass along more than \$13.99 million in total assets in 2025 (though several states charge estate taxes at a lower level).

LaPiana says that by listing a life insurance beneficiary on your policy, you can speed up the inheritance versus other assets, like real estate, which must go through a court process called probate first. "The money goes straight to the beneficiaries with no court costs or uncertainty." He says to make sure your beneficiary listings remain up to date because they take precedent over anything written in your will. **CONTINUED ON P.11**

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**You need to qualify based on health, but it's gotten easier**

Most policies require you to pass medical underwriting before you can buy. Based on your current health and medical history, the insurer decides if you qualify and at what price. "With modern medicine, people who had serious issues in years past, like heart problems or cancer, can still qualify assuming the conditions are managed the right way," says LaPiana.

If you cannot qualify or want to skip underwriting, there are policies that do not check health records. Be warned though: They tend to be much more expensive and have very limited benefits. For example, some won't pay out if you pass away within three years of signing up.

**Not every insurer delivers the same quality**

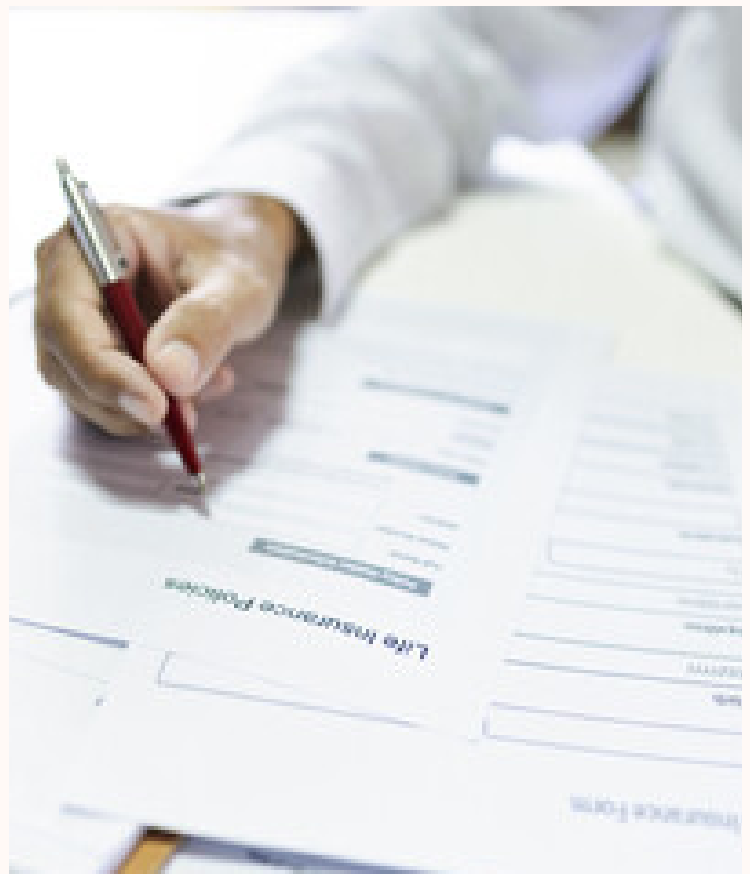
LaPiana believes not every insurer delivers the same quality with their product offerings or price competitiveness with their rates. Consider collecting quotes from a few insurers to compare their offers.

You should also check the financial rating of an insurer. "You want to know they've got the financial strength to deliver the promised payment years down the road." Since 2013, one or two insurers per year have been taken over by state insurance departments due to financial issues.

While state guaranty associations do cover losses if an insurer goes bankrupt, there are limits, so your heirs might not receive the full amount promised by your policy. Most states provide coverage for at least \$300,000 in life insurance death benefits. You can check the website of your state's guaranty association for the specifics of your state. Find your state association at the National Organization of Life and Health Insurance Guaranty Associations.

**Life insurance agents usually earn a juicy commission**

Many insurance agents earn commissions, and the larger the sale the more they can earn. That means the incentives do not always line up with what's actually in your best interest. To get unbiased advice, top insurance experts recommend using an insurance rep who works as a fiduciary. A fiduciary must put your interest ahead of his or her own when recommending products, even if it means forgoing a larger commission. They consider whether life insurance makes sense as part of your entire financial plan. Or not. Do your due diligence.



## *How To Save Money This Summer--Record-breaking heat on the way*



Is your home ready to tackle the soaring temperatures of summer? While you may be excited about relaxing poolside on sun-soaked afternoons, your living space might need a little tune-up to ensure you stay cool and comfortable when you head back inside. The key to a home that's perfectly equipped to beat the heat? Don't let rising summer temperatures take you by surprise. Instead, prepare like a pro! And you don't have to be an HVAC expert or spend a ton of cash to get the job done.

With a few simple, effective tips and tricks, you can easily transform your home into a sanctuary from the heat throughout the summer. From optimizing your air conditioning system for maximum comfort to quick and easy cooling hacks, here's how to prepare your home to beat that summer sizzle.

### **Summer heat home preparation**

- Check your thermostat and make sure it's programmed properly for summer temperatures. This will help reduce energy usage during peak hours, which can save money on energy bills. If you're not sure when peak hours are, check with your utility provider.
- Check your AC unit and make sure it's in good working order before temperatures rise. If needed, it's always helpful to have it serviced by a qualified technician before summer hits.

- Clean vents and replace air filters regularly. Over time, pollutants can build up in vents and air filters, which can restrict airflow and make your AC unit work harder. Cleaning vents and replacing air filters regularly will help your AC unit run more efficiently and save you money on your energy bills.
  - Tip: If you live in a rented residence, call the maintenance team and have them service air filters and vents.
- Keep shades closed during the day and open your interior doors. This will help block out the sun's heat and circulate the cool air throughout your home.
- Set your fans to move counterclockwise in the summer and clockwise in the winter. Fans that move counterclockwise create a windchill effect, which can help you feel cooler in the summer. Fans that move clockwise help circulate warm air in the winter.
- Set your thermostat a few degrees higher in the summer and use fans to circulate the air. This will help you stay cool and comfortable without running your AC unit as much.
- Tip: You can use multiple fans to create a cross breeze. This can be done by placing fans in opposite windows or doorways.
- If you live in a temporary or rented residence, consider using window film. Window film can help block out the sun's heat and keep your home cooler. It can also be removed without damaging your windows.

The sooner you prep your home, the faster you will save money and stay cool!

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**Travel costs are down**

Broadly, travel costs have declined, which may help travelers looking to stretch their budget. Hotel room rates are down 2.4% from a year ago, according to a recent report by NerdWallet. Rental car costs are also down 2.1% in that same timeframe, while airfares are down 7.9%.

Round-trip domestic airfare for this summer is averaging \$265 per ticket, according to the 2025 summer outlook by Hopper, a travel site. That's down 3% from \$274 in 2024 and down 8% since 2019, the lowest level in three years.

Travel costs for international travel are generally down, said Hayley Berg, the lead economist at Hopper. The average round-trip airfare between the U.S. and Europe, the most popular international destination, costs \$850 per ticket this summer, down 8% from 2024, Hopper found.

In spite of slightly lower prices for travel, people are generally spending more due to inflation and might have less leftover money to spend on non-essential items like travel.

**'The root of all of our hacks'**

Of those who reduced their summer travel budgets, 34% of respondents plan to cut back on their in-destination spending activity, such as food or paid guided excursions, Deloitte found. About 30% plan to stay with family and friends instead of paying for lodging, and 21% chose to drive instead of flying to their destination.

You can also save money this summer if you can be flexible with things like when you take the time off, your destination, what you do while you're there and your mode of transportation, experts say.

"The root of all of our hacks for saving this summer is flexibility," said Berg.

Airfare tends to spike or be higher during federal holiday weekends like the Fourth of July and Labor Day, Hopper found. This year, prices on these weekends will be about 34% higher compared to other weekends.

Instead of flying in the middle of the summer, consider delaying trips toward the end of the season, in late August or even early September, Berg said. Both price and travel demand will typically drop off by then as the new school year starts and employees go back to regular work schedules.

What's more, flying in the middle of the week can help save as much as 20% on airfare, per the site's report.

Traveling on a Tuesday or Wednesday can also help vacationers save about \$67 on a roundtrip domestic flight this summer, Hopper found. That flexibility can help travelers save over \$100 on international trips to Europe or Asia.

Have a happy, safe, and budget-friendly Summer!



## Welcome one of our credit union partners!

As a nonprofit consumer education organization, ACC has developed partnerships with credit unions across the country. These partnerships allow ACC members eligibility with our credit unions. If approved, our members gain access to a member-owned financial institution, with products and services designed to make banking more affordable, simple and convenient, and to offer additional resources that can help our members identify and achieve their financial dreams.

Scient Federal Credit Union

60 Colver Ave,  
Groton, CT 06340

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### Providing financial solutions to help realize dreams.

It's no wonder people want to be part of Scient FCU! As a nonprofit financial institution, we offer lower fees, reduced loan rates, and higher earnings on deposit accounts. How can you join thousands of others in taking advantage of such exceptional financial services? There are three paths to membership:

1. Employer Groups
2. New London Ties
3. Consumer Council Membership

No matter how you qualify to join, a one-time membership fee of \$5 is all that's required to become a Scient member for life.

### The Credit Union Difference

When you belong to a credit union, you're a member of a not-for-profit financial institution. That means any revenues beyond expenses are reinvested in the form of better rates and lower fees for the members, unlike banks who pay their stockholders.

Each member owns a part of the credit union upon investing their "share" (this is the initial \$5 deposit into your Scient Share Savings account) and receives one vote at the credit union's annual meeting. Those votes choose our Board of Directors and each board member serves for a term and may be re-elected. Any member in good standing may run for an open position on the **Board of Directors**.

Credit unions offer many of the same products and services provided by for-profit banks, including checking, savings, loans and online banking. Credit unions even have a nationwide ATM network allowing fee-free access to your money.



### Our Story

Scient Federal Credit Union was started in 1968 by four Pfizer pharmaceutical scientists. These four people realized they could pool their resources to financially help each other and their colleagues better than the banks. From this simple start, Scient has grown to more than 19,000 members helping each other. The goal of this not-for-profit financial cooperative is to help improve the lives of each member-owner through creative solutions for every situation.

Each of us has a unique set of dreams, goals and factors affecting our lives. What ties us together is our desire for financial freedom and willingness to take action. Over the years, we have been fortunate enough to find financial experts who have helped us grow and expand our membership offerings. Scient offers tailored financial solutions that provide opportunities to help all of us realize our dreams.

### Why join Scient Federal Credit Union

- Our culture is grounded in integrity, trust and the desire to help others.
- Profits of the Credit Union are returned to you in the form of lower loan rates, higher deposit rates and lower cost services.
- By having an account at Scient FCU, you are a member-owner of the credit union.

For more information, visit our website at [www.scientfcu.org](http://www.scientfcu.org) or call us toll-free at (860)445-1060.

## Welcome one of our credit union partners!

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Meritrust Credit Union  
2050 N Tyler Rd,  
Wichita, KS 67212  
+++



### Our Mission

**To improve the lives of our members and the communities we serve.**

Our commitment to integrity and financial safety and security is reflected in how we live out our core values.

### Core Values

As a member-owned cooperative, Meritrust serves a broader purpose that emphasizes concern for people and the communities in which they live and work. Members are at the heart of all we do and they drive our decision making. Our mission will be accomplished through safe and sound financial management supported by qualified volunteers and employees.

### Our History

When you're ambitious for the future, it helps to appreciate where you've been.

### Who are we?

In 1935, seven pioneers from Stearman Aircraft Company in Wichita, Kansas, organized and chartered a credit union for its employees. From there, our membership grew to include employees of Boeing, their suppliers and, in time, Spirit Aerosystems. In nine decades, we've expanded our vision, our team and our membership. With a legacy rooted in aviation, Meritrust proudly serves over 119,000 members within the aero industry and throughout the Midwest.

### Your Security

We are safe and secure. Financial security is our primary concern and should also be yours. Read this page to familiarize yourself with Meritrust's financial statement, security efforts and gain confidence from our guidelines to online security and preventing identity theft.

Security is one of our utmost priorities. We understand that our members trust us as their financial partners, and delivering a secure banking experience is critical to best serving them. You can click on each icon below to learn more about security, protecting your finances and securing your digital presence.

Meritrust is a not-for-profit, member-owned organization with roots firmly planted in Kansas and our aviation heritage. We are committed to improving the lives of our members and the communities we serve, and we do this by investing in the places and people that matter most: our members.

For more information, visit our website at [www.meritrustcu.org](http://www.meritrustcu.org) or call us toll-free at (316) 683-1199.

## Welcome one of our credit union partners!

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GreenState Credit Union  
2355 Landon Rd,  
North Liberty, IA 52317  
+++



### Creating Lasting Value.

#### Our Vision

**We create lasting value for those we serve.**

#### Our Mission

As the nation's greatest financial institution we...

- Make a profound impact in the lives of our members.
- Empower our employees to create endless opportunities and shape our future.
- Enhance the vitality of our communities by donating our time, talents, and financial support.

#### About Us

Organized in 1938, GreenState has grown to be one of the Midwest's largest credit union and one of the top financial institutions in the United States for returning profits to members in the form of better rates and lower fees.

GreenState Credit Union serves over 400,000 members with 33 office locations. Membership is open to:

- Anyone living or working in Iowa or nearby counties in Illinois, Wisconsin, Nebraska or South Dakota
  - Illinois counties: Boone, Carroll, DuPage, Hancock, Henderson, Henry, Jo Daviess, Kane, Knox, McHenry, Mercer, Ogle, Rock Island, Stephenson, Warren, Whiteside, Will county North of I-80, Winnebago
  - Wisconsin counties: Crawford, Grant, Lafayette
  - Nebraska counties: Dakota, Thurston, Burt, Washington, Douglas, Sarpy, Cass, Otoe
  - South Dakota counties: Union, Lincoln, Minnehaha, Moody, Brookings

- Current employees of a business/organization, or members of an association, who GreenState partners with.
- University of Iowa students, staff, and alumni.
- Direct relatives of current GreenState Credit Union members.
- Members of the Iowa Consumer Council/American Consumer Council.

#### Members & Community

##### **GreenState exists to serve its members.**

Our "members first" philosophy has led to a national rank by independent research firm Callahan & Associates for Return of Member (ROM). This measures how effectively a credit union returns its profits back in the form of better rates on deposits and loans. For nearly a decade, GreenState's ROM rank has consistently been in the top 1% up against credit unions nationwide.

##### **GreenState exists to serve the community.**

We volunteer time and donate funds to support the local organizations and charities that help our communities thrive. We provide financial education for area schools and businesses to help residents grow and make smart money decisions.

For more information, visit our website at [www.greenstate.org](http://www.greenstate.org) or call us toll-free at 800-397-3790.



## Welcome one of our credit union partners!

As a nonprofit consumer education organization, ACC has developed partnerships with credit unions across the country. These partnerships allow ACC members eligibility with our credit unions. If approved, our members gain access to a member-owned financial institution, with products and services designed to make banking more affordable, simple and convenient, and to offer additional resources that can help our members identify and achieve their financial dreams.

Tampa Bay Federal Credit Union  
101 Western Ave.  
Hampden, ME 04444  
+++



**90 years of service.**

### About Us

After operating expenses and reserve requirements are met, income from loans and other revenue is returned to all members in the form of great rates, lower fees, and a comprehensive selection of financial services. Tampa Bay Federal Credit Union is proud to live the credit union philosophy of "people helping people" for its members and the community.

At Tampa Bay Federal Credit Union, no two members are the same. Blue or white collar, younger or wiser, they all have one thing in common—they work hard for every dollar they earn. We respect that, and show our appreciation in low rates, flexible banking hours and consistent personalized care. When you call or visit one of our branches, we'll guide you through available service options to help you make the best decision for your situation.

### Tampa Bay Federal Credit Union History

Tampa Bay Federal Credit Union was chartered on May 23, 1935. Originally known as Tampa City Employees Credit Union, it was organized by 13 City of Tampa workers.

It's said that for many months during its inception, the assets were stored in a Hav-A-Tampa cigar box. The first year's assets were almost \$400, which was a fortune in that era! Tampa Bay Federal Credit Union has continued to serve not only City of Tampa employees, but also the Tampa Bay community in general.

For over 90 years, we continue to serve the local community delivering a wide array of financial services in a helpful and friendly manner. As we start another chapter for the next 80 years, we adopt the latest technology to keep our members in constant evolution with the new times.

### Joining Tampa Bay Federal Credit Union

Thank you for considering Tampa Bay Federal for your financial needs! Since Tampa Bay Federal is a credit union, new Tampa Bay Federal members will need to qualify to join, but don't worry! Qualifying is easy.

We have several ways you can join:

You live, work, worship, or attend school in specific geographic locations.

[Check location >](#)

You're an employee of a company who is affiliated with us.

[List of Eligible Employers >](#)

You have an immediate family member who is a Tampa Bay Federal member already. We just need your family member's name and you're in!

For more information, visit our website at [tampabayfederal.com](http://tampabayfederal.com) or call us toll-free at (800) 380-8880.

# ATTENTION: CREDIT UNIONS

## Want more Small Business Members?

Gain a competitive edge over other financial institutions by offering more than just traditional financial services. The ACC-SBS Program can help your Business Members grow and expand.

### About ACC's Small Business Success (SBS) program

ACC's Small Business Success program offers your credit union a competitive edge over other financial institutions by providing valuable business education, tools, resources, and coaching to help your business members grow and succeed!

By integrating ACC's SBS program with your Business Development, Marketing and Lending initiatives, your credit union can enhance its appeal to small enterprises, expand its lending capabilities and build stronger loyalty. As small businesses succeed, your credit union benefits from increased membership and net asset growth.

**What  
Does  
the  
ACC  
Small  
Business  
Success  
Program  
Offer  
Your  
Credit  
Union?**

★ **Differentiate Your Credit Union**

Offer more than accounts – be the go-to resource for small business growth.

★ **Turn Accounts into Relationships**

Deepen loyalty with tools that drive business success and member engagement.

★ **Done-For-You Business Support**

Ready-made tools and resources that add value without extra work for your team.

★ **Grow Your Bottom Line**

Help businesses thrive – and watch deposits, lending, and retention grow.

★ **Be Their Business Partner**

Deliver real solutions that make your Credit Union essential to their success.



### Next Step...

Let ACC help your credit union transform how it connects with businesses and leverage those relationships for greater success!



Scan the QR code to watch a free, brief video that reveals how to attract more small business members to your credit union!

Contact us today!

858-533-7778 or email: [SmallBiz@AmericanConsumerCouncil.org](mailto:SmallBiz@AmericanConsumerCouncil.org)

# *How ACC is Helping Small Businesses Grow—And Why Credit Unions Are Perfect Partners*

Across America, small businesses are facing an uphill climb. They're navigating higher costs, shifting customer habits, and increasing competition—all while wearing every hat in the business. What they're not looking for? Another business checking account.

And that's the opportunity.

At the American Consumer Council (ACC), we believe small businesses are the backbone of our local economies. Their success fuels consumer confidence, community pride, and economic stability. But too often, they're overlooked, underserved, or treated like just another transaction.

That's why we created the Small Business Success (SBS) initiative. It's a strategic program designed to help small businesses grow, and to position Credit Unions as the community champions that help make it happen.

**The Problem: Looking and Sounding Like Everyone Else**

Walk into almost any financial institution today, and the business offerings sound nearly identical: checking, savings, credit cards, and maybe an SBA loan.

But business owners don't wake up excited about their deposit account. They care about growing revenue, keeping more profit, and making smarter decisions. The real differentiator isn't the product—it's the partnership.

Credit Unions have a unique advantage. They're Trusted. Local. Relationship-driven. But to truly stand out, they must go beyond transactions and step into the role of business ally. That's where SBS comes in.

**The Solution: A Branded, Done-For-You, Turnkey Business Growth Program That Builds Loyalty and Results**  
SBS is a branded, done-for-you growth program that Credit Unions can offer directly to their small business members. It's practical, easy to launch, and creates instant community impact.

One of the most powerful features? A 12-week Group Business Coaching Program—offered entirely free to participating business members.

Recently, a forward-thinking Credit Union (which we'll keep anonymous for now) piloted this exact coaching program with 100 small business members. The results?

- Business owners learned how to cut costs, increase prices, and drive more leads—without spending more on marketing.
- 
- They received weekly coaching, worksheets, and video support to drive implementation.
- 
- The Credit Union delivered over \$149,000 in business value through the pilot—positioning themselves as more than a financial provider. They became a true growth partner.
- 

And here's the kicker: the CU's internal team didn't have to do the heavy lifting. The ACC/SBS team handled all onboarding, coaching, branding, and tracking—making the CU look like the hero, without extra workload.

**Why This Matters**

Credit Unions are already rooted in the communities they serve. The SBS program simply amplifies that strength—giving them the tools to attract new business members, deepen relationships with existing ones, and differentiate from big banks and impersonal lenders.

Small business owners don't want more financial products. They want someone in their corner. With SBS, Credit Unions get to step into that corner and say: "You don't have to grow alone. We've got you." (rough...??? Plan B??)

**Let's Talk**

Want to explore how the SBS initiative could work at your Credit Union? We'd love to show you what's possible—and how easy it is to get started.

Contact:

Tom Hinton, CEO

[Tom@americanconsumercouncil.org](mailto:Tom@americanconsumercouncil.org)

Phone: ???

Mark Rosenberger

VP, Small Business Success

✉ [mark@americanconsumercouncil.org](mailto:mark@americanconsumercouncil.org)

☎ 858-231-4481

# ACC Wrap Up

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN CONSUMER COUNCIL



## Green C Certification

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for ACC's **"Green C" Certification**.

*Applications for the Fall cycle are being accepted through October 1, 2025.*

It's a proven fact that consumers prefer to do business with eco-friendly companies, implement green initiatives and that practice Corporate Social Responsibility. The process is straight-forward, and all applicants are recognized by the ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants should review the criteria, then complete and submit their applications to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the Green C Certification criteria can be viewed online at [www.AmericanConsumerCouncil.org/education](http://www.AmericanConsumerCouncil.org/education).

For more information, call 1-800-544-0414 or visit ACC's website.

## Friend of the Consumer

Is your business consumer-friendly?

Does your business deserve greater recognition for its service to consumers?

If so, you should apply for the American Consumer Council's Friend of the Consumer Award.



Each year, ACC awards numerous "Friend of the Consumer" awards to deserving manufacturers, retailers, and other businesses that produce or sell products in the United States, and which meet or exceed federally mandated standards, and have "demonstrated a commitment to American consumers by providing products or services that foster consumer confidence and market acceptance."

To apply, complete the online application at: [www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp](http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp) and return it to ACC with the application fee.

Applicants will be notified within five days of receipt of their application. Thereafter, a panel of independent judges will review your application and make a formal recommendation within 20 days of your submission.



## Financial Education

ACC is pleased to have a partnership with Nicole Middendorf. Nicole is a money maven, a knowledge junkie, and a born coach. She is an entrepreneur who left Morgan Stanley in 2003 to run her own wealth management firm. Nicole is the author of five books, a world traveler, philanthropist, and an accomplished public speaker.

As a Wealth Advisor and Certified Divorce Financial Analyst with Prosperwell Financial, her main focus is to help people create wealth from the inside out. She is able to accomplish this through one-on-one client meetings, writing books, presenting at conferences, and appearing on TV, radio, and other media.

Nicole shares financial advice and a real-life perspective on saving, planning, and investing with audiences across the country. Her primary goal is to take complicated subjects and make them easy to understand. She works hard to empower her audience to make crucial and positive changes in their own lives. Nicole's books have received local and national press coverage, where she has become known for her thoughtful concise quotes, relaxed on-air presence, and articulate delivery.

ACC is committed to promoting and providing financial education to the public. Nicole Middendorf has collaborated with us to create a new 6-part video series that promotes financial literacy for youth. Check it out here: <https://qcashfinancial.com/are-we-failing-our-kids-in-financial-literacy/>

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