

Opinion

Black Retirees Growing Older and Poorer 2025 Social Security COLA lowest in 10 years

As Americans live longer, the ability to remain financially independent is an ongoing struggle. Especially for Black and other people of color whose lifetime incomes are often lower than that of other contemporaries, finding money to save for ‘old age’ is particularly daunting.

According to the National Council on Aging, racial and ethnic minorities accounted for one in 4 adults aged 65 and older in 2022. In that same year, the average 65-year-old could expect to live another 18 years or longer, on a median income of \$29,740.

In 2022, the average yearly Social Security benefit for Black men ages 65 and older was \$15,345, and for Black women was only \$13,755. However, the average annual Social Security income for all 65 or older men was \$18,910, and for all older women was \$14,824.

In past generations retiring workers often received a gold watch, pension, and company-sponsored health insurance. But today’s retirees face far different circumstances. With few remaining pensions available, most workers must look to themselves for financial security in their old age. And Social Security has be-



Charlene Crowell
Guest Columnist

come a financial lifeline.

When enacted in 1935 during the throes of the Great Depression, Social Security was a ground-breaking federal social safety net for retirees. Financed by payroll taxes that began in 1937, both

“When the projected Medicare increase is announced, most retirees will receive a net gain of only \$10.20 in 2025.

employees and their employers paid into the program. A 1939 amendment to the law expanded the program to include survivor benefits for retirees’ widows and children, commonly known today as SSI. In 1956 disability benefits were added in a second expansion.

To compensate beneficiaries for rises in cost of living, an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) began in 1975. Prior to 1972, only spe-

cial acts of Congress could increase benefits.

Today, more than 80 years later, 68 million retirees and 4.5 million other program participants recently learned that a 2.5 percent COLA increase will be added to their monthly checks – even lower than the 2.6 percent decade-long average computed by Social Security. For retirees, the increase will begin in January. SSI beneficiaries will receive their increase with their December 31 payment.

Next year’s increase means

be even less.

As the nation still struggles to cope with rising prices, the agency’s statement and those of elder advocates were polar opposites.

“Social Security benefits and SSI payments will increase in 2025, helping tens of millions of people keep up with expenses even as inflation has started to cool,” said Martin O’Malley, Commissioner of Social Security.

But according to AARP, when the projected Medicare increase is announced, most retirees will receive a net gain of only \$10.20 in 2025.

“[E]ven with the COLA, we know many older Americans who rely on Social Security may find it hard to pay their bills,” Jo Ann Jenkins, AARP’s chief executive officer, said in a statement. “Social Security is the primary source of income for 40 percent of older Americans.”

AARP’s concerns are validated by findings in an April 2024 report from the Society of Actuaries Research Institute, entitled, Retirement Wealth by Race and Ethnicity: Differences, Trends and Contributing Factors.

Read the rest of this commentary at
TheSkanner.com

The Clock is Ticking for the Government to Do What is Right for This Flooded Historic Black Community

The state of Alabama destroyed their homes. Your federal tax dollars helped pay for it.

We are checking back in on the historic Black Shiloh community in Elba, Alabama.

Ever since 2018, when the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) expanded a highway running through the town, stormwater runoff floods the homes in this community whenever it rains. It is an ongoing crisis.

Members of this community have lost everything. Some of the families here have owned these homes for generations. Their generational wealth has been wiped out. They deserve justice. They deserve to be made whole. Now, the federal government could be running out of time to help.

Pastor Timothy Williams is a Shiloh community member who has been a leader in the fight to get justice for his neighbors and his own family. Back in March, when I spoke with Pastor Williams, he told me, “My house has already sunk two feet into the mud. I see my inheritance and my children’s American Dream being washed away and stolen.”

Since then, Pastor Williams says things have only gotten worse. He now says the frus-



Ben Jealous
Guest Columnist

tration and hopelessness taking root in the community has led to people using alcohol and drugs as an escape, whereas several years ago that would be unheard of in

“I see my inheritance and my children’s American Dream being washed away and stolen

this community.

It speaks to the toll on this community being more than just economic. Watching your home and community be destroyed, and your generational wealth evaporate, has physical, mental, and emotional impacts just like any trauma does. People are watching their homes sink, and living with the danger all this physical upheaval of

their land has caused with power lines and gas and sewage pipes. Pastor Williams himself has been warned his sinking house could eventually hit a natural gas pipeline causing a rupture or even an explosion. Think about the impact this must have not only on the entire community’s mental health, but what it must do to the kids in the community and their ability to succeed in school.

Beyond that, there is the clear racial factor here. This is Alabama after all. The reckless disregard for this rural Black community in the state’s highway project was not something unfamiliar to people who have lived there for decades. Nor were years of inaction and being left behind by the state (and now the federal government) since then. And there have been acts of intimidation by outsiders aimed at community members like Pastor Williams who have spoken up – in March, Pastor Williams told me the restaurant he owns had been the target of a boycott by some local whites. And white people make up most of his clientele.

In a place where the shadow of Jim Crow still looms large, that justice for this Black

community seems so elusive seems like no mere coincidence. It is understandable that some in the community believe the storm drainage pipes were aimed at their community intentionally.

In the months since I first spoke with Pastor Williams, I have visited Shiloh. And I have been working closely with Dr. Robert Bullard, known as Father of Environmental Justice and this country’s pre-eminent voice exposing environmental racism, to build pressure on both the state and federal governments to act. Elba, Alabama is Dr. Bullard’s hometown. It is an example of the pervasiveness of environmental racism, that such injustice could continue in the hometown of a prominent expert who sits on the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council.

Someone else who visited Shiloh the past few months is Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg. And on October 4, the Federal Highway Administration announced a Voluntary Resolution Agreement with ALDOT to address the ongoing flooding in Shiloh every time it storms.

Read the rest of this commentary at
TheSkanner.com