

Nevada AARP Survey of Members: Concerns and Opinions About Utility Rates and Programs

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Utility Rates and Programs**

**Report Prepared by
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About This Survey

This mail survey of AARP members in Nevada explores their concerns, state legislative priorities, preferences for involvement with AARP, and preferences for receiving information from AARP. It also examines members' experiences and opinions on prescription drugs, the state's budget, transportation, and utilities in Nevada.

AARP conducted the AARP Nevada Member Opinion Survey from June through August, 2004. A random sample of 2,000 AARP members in Nevada, proportionally stratified by three age segments—50 to 59, 60 to 74, and 75+, was selected from AARP's membership database. Each sampled member was contacted about the survey in four ways: a pre-notification postcard, the survey itself, a reminder postcard, and a second survey. Forty-nine percent of the sampled Nevada members returned surveys by the cut-off date, providing 971 useable surveys for analysis. Thus, the survey has a sampling error of plus or minus 3.14 percent.¹ Survey responses were weighted to reflect the distribution of the age segments in the member population of Nevada.

This report is part of the larger survey and examines members concerns about utility rates and services and their level of support for maintaining energy assistance programs. This report summarizes weighted overall findings on the topics mentioned above, and discusses differences among three age segments: 50-59, 60-74 and 75+. Throughout the report, statistics representing member responses are reported in percentages. In some instances, percentages are small and may not seem to represent a significant proportion of members, yet when projected to the total Nevada membership the actual number of people may be substantial. As of January 2005, the number of AARP members in Nevada was 284,156. A full annotated questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

Highlights

Utility Rates, Program, and Protections

- Most members report an increase in their electric bill (85%), gas bill (73%), and phone bill (65%), and at least four in ten Nevada AARP members say the rates for each are unreasonable: electric (57%); gas (41%); and phone (44%).
- Seven in ten (69%) Nevada members strongly agree there should be stronger consumer protections against deceptive acts and practices by utility service providers.
- Over eight in ten members strongly (44%) or somewhat (42%) support low-income state energy assistance programs to help those residents pay their energy bills.

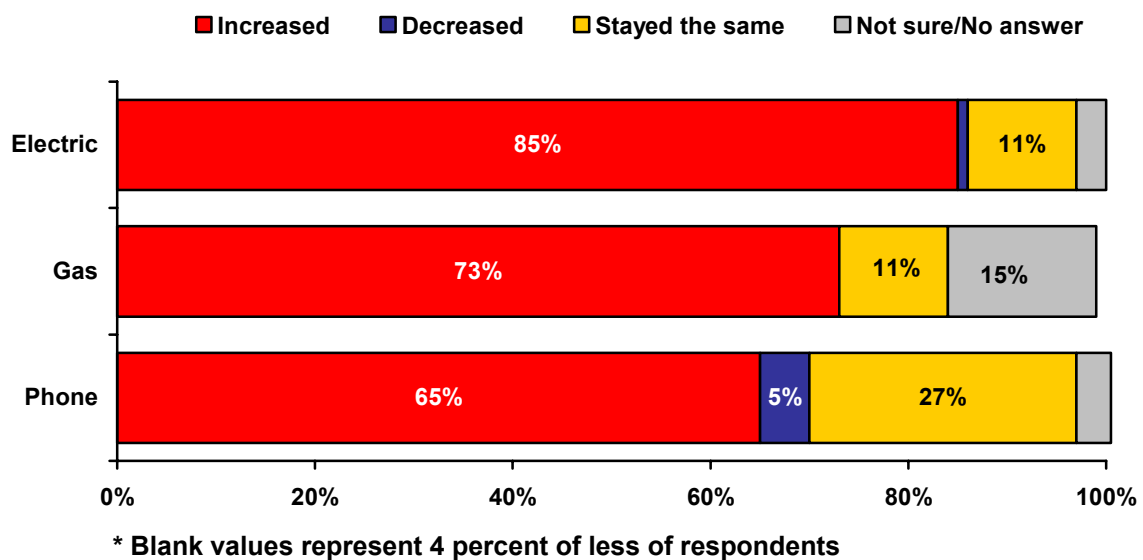
¹ This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results obtained in the sample would fall in a range of 3.14 percentage points of what would have been obtained if every AARP member in Nevada age 50 or older had been surveyed.

Findings

Most Nevada members say their overall energy bills increased over the past three years.

When asked if their energy bills had increased, decreased, or stayed the same in the past three years, most members in Nevada indicate an increase in each of their utility bills – over eight in ten say their electric rates increased, about three-quarters experienced an increase in their gas bill, and over six in ten said their phone charges increased.

**Nevada Members Reporting Changes in Utility Rates
(N=971)**



Age Differences: Changes in Utility Charges

Reported changes in any of the utility charges are consistent across all age groups of Nevada members.

Although four in ten Nevada AARP members say their utility bills are not difficult to understand, similar proportions indicate some difficulty understanding their statements.

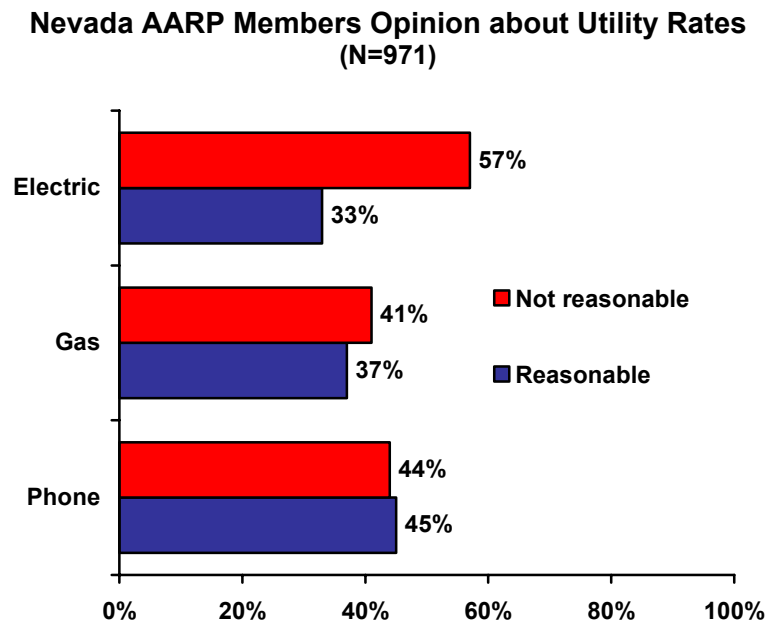
Members are divided over the difficulty in understanding their utility bill or statement. Just under half of Nevada members say their electric (46%), phone (45%) and gas (42%) bills are very or somewhat difficult to understand, but similar proportions indicate that these utility bills are not difficult to understand (see Question 18 in Annotated Questionnaire).

Age Differences: Difficulty Understanding Utility Bills

Nevada members ages 75 and older are more likely than younger members to say that reading their electric and gas bill are very difficult to understand (electric: 50-59: **10%**; 60-74: **16%**; 75+: **21%**; gas: (50-59: **8%**; 60-74: **13%**; 75+: **18%**). Members do not differ by age with respect to difficulty understanding their phone bill.

At least four in ten Nevada AARP members feel the rates for their phone, gas, and electric are not reasonable.

Members are somewhat divided over whether their electric, gas, or phone rates are reasonable or not. Nearly six in ten say their electric rates are not reasonable but one-third think they are. Four in ten say their gas rates are not reasonable, but just slightly fewer say they are. Likewise, more than four in ten think their phone rates are not reasonable, but a similar proportion thinks they are.



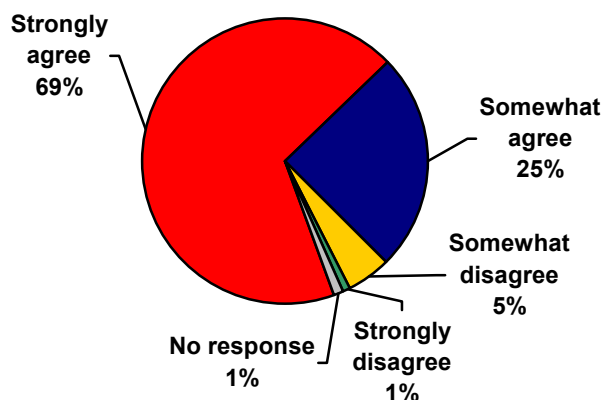
Age Differences: Reasonability of Utility Rates

Nevada members ages 50-59 are more likely than older members to feel their gas utility rates are reasonable (50-59: **43%**; 60-74: **36%**; 75+: **30%**). There are no age differences with respect to whether members feel their electric or phone utility rates are reasonable.

Most Nevada members agree there should be stronger protections against unfair and deceptive acts and practices by service providers for Nevada utility customers.

Over nine in ten members in Nevada strongly or somewhat agree that stronger consumer protections are needed for utility customers against deceptive acts and practices by service providers. Only six percent disagree.

Level of Agreement Among Nevada Members for Greater Utility Consumer Protections (N=971)

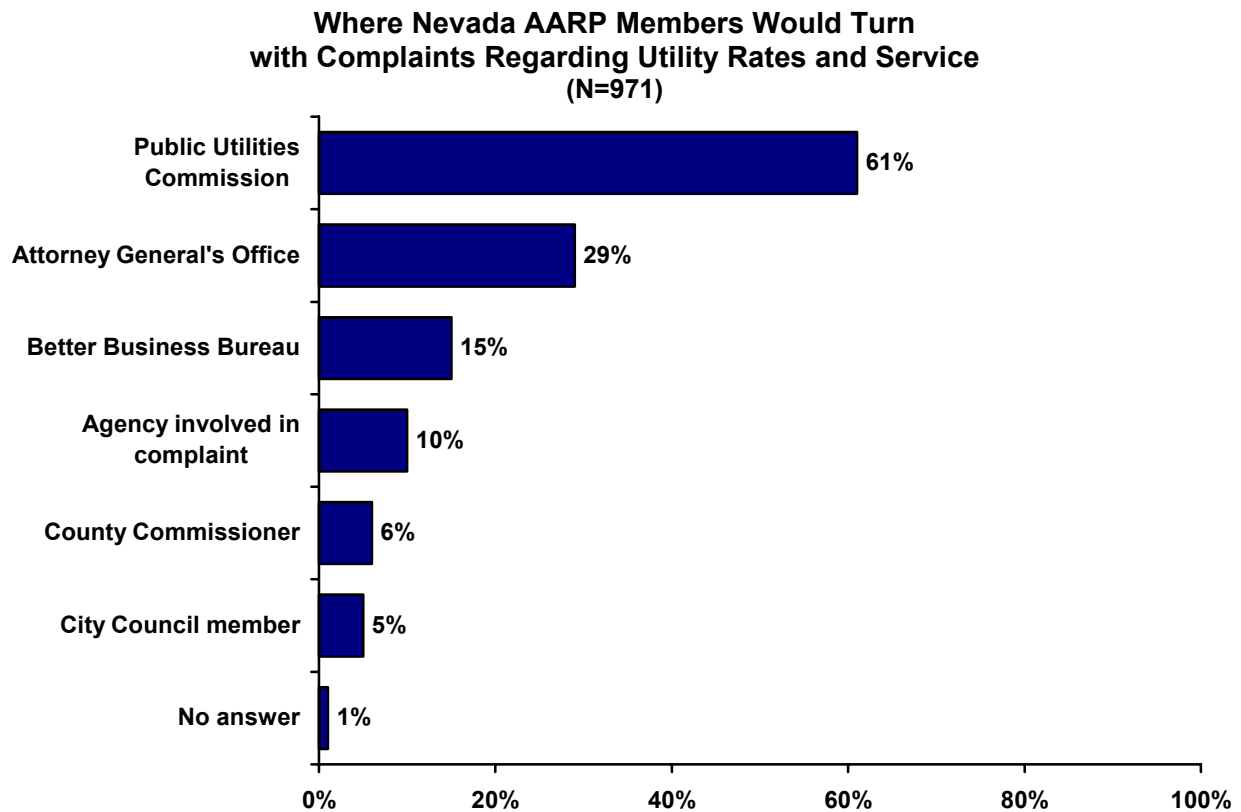


Age Differences: Utility Consumer Protections

There are no age differences among members who agree or disagree that there is a need for stronger consumer protections against deceptive acts and practices by utility service providers.

Nevada members would turn to the Public Utilities Commission or the Attorney General’s office to get help in resolving their complaint about their utility bill.

Six in ten Nevada members would attempt to resolve their complaints about their utility bill by turning to the Public Utilities Commission, while three in ten would turn to the Attorney General’s Office. About one in six members would turn to the Better Business Bureau and one in ten to the agency directly involved in the complaint to resolve such issues.



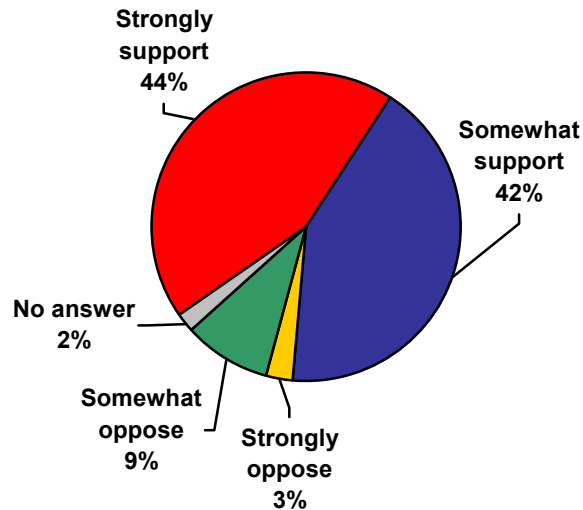
Age Differences: Potential Sources of Utility Complaint Help

Nevada AARP members do not differ by age with respect to where they would turn for help if they had a complaint about their utility rates or service.

Over four in ten Nevada members strongly support the State maintaining energy assistance programs to help low-income residents pay their bill.

The majority of Nevada members strongly support or somewhat support state energy assistance programs to help lower income residents. Only about one in ten somewhat or strongly oppose maintaining such programs.

Level of Support for Maintaining Nevada Energy Assistance Programs (N=971)

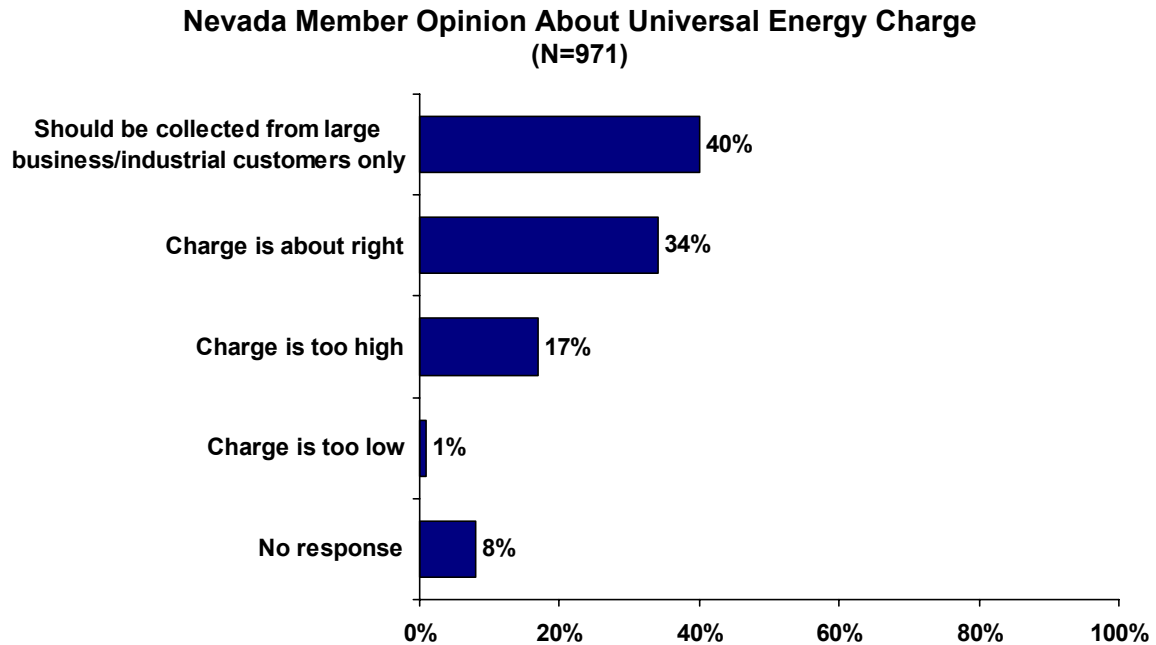


Age Differences: Support for Energy Assistance Programs

There are no age differences among Nevada members with regard to support for state energy assistance programs to help lower income residents pay their bills.

Many Nevada AARP members feel that the Universal Energy Charge collected monthly should be collected from businesses and industrial customers only and not residents.

Four in ten members feel the Universal Energy Charge should be collected from businesses and industrial customers only and not residents. However, one-third say the current monthly charge to help support the Nevada Energy Assistance and Conservation Program is fair or just about right. One in six members feel the charge is too high, and only one percent say it is too low.



Age Differences: Member opinion about universal energy charge

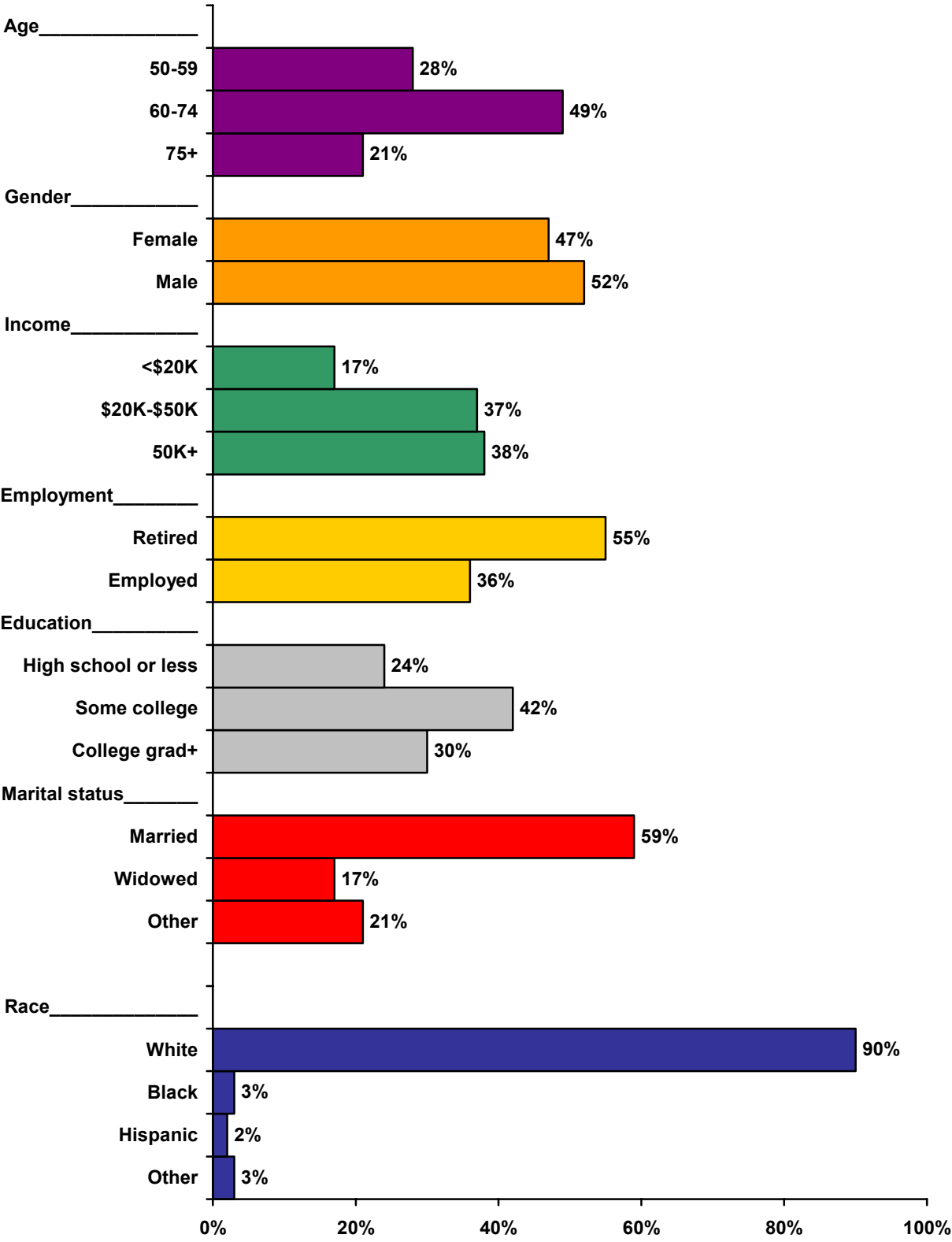
Members in Nevada do not differ by age with respect to whether they feel the universal energy charge is too high, too low, or just right. Nor do members who think the Universal Energy Charge should be collected from large business or industrial customers differ by age.

Conclusions

The findings clearly show that Nevada AARP members are supportive of the state maintaining low-income energy assistance programs. This may be a particularly noteworthy finding given that most members report an increase in their electric, gas, and phone bills over the past three years, and at least two in five feel that their phone, gas, or electric rates do not seem reasonable.

Finally, most members agree there needs to be stronger consumer protections implemented in Nevada to guard them from unfair or deceptive practices by energy service providers. Additionally, if they had a complaint about their energy or utility services or rates, six in ten say they would turn to the Public Utilities Commission, and another three in ten say they would turn to the Attorney General's Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=971)



APPENDIX A
ANNOTATED QUESTIONNAIRE

2004 Nevada AARP Survey of Members: Concerns and State Legislative Issues

Weighted N = 971; Response Rate = 49%; Sampling Error = +/- 3.14
(Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. A "*" means less than 1%)

Personal Concerns

1. Below is a list of concerns that have been expressed by people age 50 and older. Please rate your own level of concern about each item using a 5-point scale where 1 means you are "not at all concerned" and 5 means you are "extremely concerned."

	Extremely Concerned	4	3	2	Not at all Concerned	No Response
a. Having Medicare as a base for retirement health coverage	65%	16%	11%	3%	3%	1%
b. Providing care or financial support for a parent, grandchild or other relative	25%	15%	24%	13%	20%	3%
c. Having Social Security as a base for retirement income	61%	17%	12%	4%	5%	1%
d. Finding affordable, high quality health insurance	71%	11%	9%	3%	6%	1%
e. Staying in your own home as you get older	64%	17%	9%	4%	5%	1%
f. Staying physically fit/maintaining a healthy diet	63%	24%	9%	2%	2%	1%
g. Having high quality long-term care for you or a family member	58%	22%	11%	4%	3%	1%
h. Making sure your pension benefits and/or retirement savings are safe and secure	78%	11%	6%	2%	2%	1%
i. Having safe and affordable transportation alternatives if you are no longer able to drive yourself places	53%	24%	15%	5%	3%	1%
j. Finding work in retirement	13%	16%	26%	14%	29%	2%
k. Having enough money to meet daily expenses	58%	16%	14%	5%	7%	1%
l. Facing age discrimination in employment	26%	14%	18%	12%	29%	2%
m. Having adequate information on Medicaid, the government health insurance program for low income people	31%	15%	20%	12%	21%	1%
n. Having access to affordable prescription drugs	72%	14%	8%	2%	4%	1%
o. Protecting your right to privacy	63%	16%	12%	5%	4%	1%
p. Becoming ill or disabled	61%	22%	12%	2%	3%	*

1. CONTINUED-- Please rate your own level of concern about each item using a 5-point scale where 1 means you are "not at all concerned" and 5 means you are "extremely concerned."

	Extremely Concerned				Not at all Concerned	No Response
q. Being a victim of crime	44%	20%	24%	7%	5%	1%
r. Avoiding business practices that are unfair or fraudulent	47%	20%	21%	5%	5%	2%
s. Having consumer protections in health care plans	60%	22%	13%	2%	2%	2%
t. Continuing to drive safely	52%	23%	15%	4%	5%	3%
u. State budget and its impact on taxes	56%	22%	14%	4%	3%	2%
v. Utility rates and service	66%	19%	10%	3%	1%	2%

AARP Roles and Activities at the State Level

2. Listed below are some opportunities AARP could provide within your state to address member interests and concerns. Please read each one carefully and indicate how likely it is that you, personally, would make use of the opportunity if it were offered in your state.

Opportunity to...	Definitely Would Use	Probably Would Use	Might or Might Not Use	Probably Would Not Use	Definitely Would Not Use	No Response
a. Attend workshop series or several meetings, or classes, on topics of interest or concern to me	11%	21%	43%	17%	6%	2%
b. Attend one-time educational events on topics of interest or concern to me	15%	33%	36%	10%	5%	2%
c. Receive written information on topics of interest or concern to me	30%	37%	24%	5%	2%	2%
d. Participate in activities to improve state laws, policies, regulations, or practices that affect me	12%	23%	38%	18%	7%	2%
e. Access a website for information on topics of interest or concern to me and for information about upcoming AARP events in my state	22%	25%	22%	12%	16%	3%
f. Volunteer my time to an AARP activity in my own community	6%	14%	38%	25%	15%	2%
g. Call my AARP State Office to listen to a recording about upcoming AARP events in my state	7%	13%	33%	28%	17%	2%
h. Attend AARP volunteer information sessions in my community that give me an opportunity to meet other people and provide some community services	7%	15%	37%	24%	15%	2%

3. If AARP has or were to have programs, services, or activities in your community, how would you want to find out about them? (Check ALL that apply)

<u>%</u>	
62	Read about local AARP activities in newspapers in your community
25	Call a toll-free or local telephone number for a pre-recorded list of current AARP activities, programs, and services in your community
12	Contact an AARP volunteer or AARP Chapter member in or near your community
15	Attend a meeting at which AARP programs and activities are described
81	Receive information by mail (e.g., letter, brochure, flyer)
34	Visit the AARP Nevada website to access information
29	Receive an email notification
44	Tune in to a local TV channel or program
31	Hear about them on a local radio station/program
2	No Response

State Legislative Issues

4. To be effective, AARP Nevada wants to work on the most important issues facing Nevada AARP members. Keeping in mind what's most important to you, how much of a priority should it be for AARP to work on the following legislative issues in Nevada?

	Top Priority	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority	Not a priority at all	No Response
a. Availability, cost, and quality of health care	77%	17%	4%	1%	1%	1%
b. Consumer protection against fraud	48%	30%	15%	4%	1%	2%
c. Maintain a fair and adequate tax system	54%	28%	12%	2%	1%	3%
d. Access to affordable prescription drugs	73%	17%	5%	2%	1%	2%
e. Utility services and rates	58%	26%	10%	2%	1%	3%
f. How older persons can remain independent as they age	53%	29%	13%	2%	1%	1%
g. Availability of transportation systems	40%	28%	23%	6%	2%	2%

Prescription Drugs

5. Do you or another person in your household get any help in paying for prescription drugs from insurance or other health coverage?

<u>%</u>	
71	Yes
26	No
1	Not sure
2	No Response

6. In the past 12 months, have you or has anyone in your household taken any prescription medications?

<u>%</u>	
92	Yes
6	No SKIP TO QUESTION 10
0	Not sure SKIP TO QUESTION 10
2	No Response

7. Are you or is anyone in your household currently taking prescription medications on a regular basis, i.e. daily, weekly, monthly? (n=897)

<u>%</u>	
94	Yes
5	No
2	No Response

8. In the past 12 months, has paying for prescription drugs been a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem for you or anyone in your household? (n=897)

<u>%</u>	
17	A major problem
37	A minor problem
44	Not a problem
2	No Response

9. In the past 12 months, approximately how much have you or other members of your household spent, EACH month, out-of-pocket for prescription drugs? (n=897)

<u>%</u>	
7	Less than \$10 per month
23	\$10 but less than \$50 per month
25	\$50 but less than \$100 per month
23	\$100 but less than \$200 per month
15	\$200 but less than \$500 per month
2	\$500 or more per month
1	Not sure
3	No Response

10. How concerned are you about being able to afford the cost of needed prescription drugs over the next two years?

<u>%</u>	
44	Very concerned
32	Somewhat concerned
15	Not very concerned
7	Not at all concerned
2	No Response

11. Many people face difficult decisions when buying prescription drugs. In the past 12 months, have you or has anyone in your household done any of the following?

	Yes	No	No Response
a. Delayed getting a prescription filled because you didn't have enough money to pay for it?	16%	82%	3%
b. Taken less medicine than your doctor prescribed to make it last longer?	19%	78%	3%
c. Cut back on items such as food, fuel, or electricity to be able to afford a prescription drug?	8%	88%	4%
d. Decided not to fill a prescription because of the cost of the drug?	22%	75%	3%
e. Ordered your prescription drugs by mail or Internet from a company <u>in the U.S.</u> because they cost less?	31%	66%	4%
f. Ordered your prescription drugs by mail or Internet from a company in <u>another country</u> because they cost less?	7%	90%	3%
g. Traveled to Mexico, Canada, or another country to purchase prescription drugs because they cost less?	6%	91%	3%

12. Have you applied for the new Medicare Prescription Discount Card?

<u>%</u>	
5	Yes
89	No
6	No Response

12a. <u>If NO</u>: Are you going to apply for this card? (n=864)			
9%	Yes	43%	Not sure
43%	No	4%	No Response

13. How important is it to you that the state of Nevada work toward making prescription drug costs more affordable to residents?

<u>%</u>	
79	Very important
14	Somewhat important
3	Not very important
1	Not at all important
1	Not sure
2	No Response

14. How strongly would you support or oppose a state prescription drug discount program in Nevada for low-income persons?

<u>%</u>	
60	Strongly support
24	Somewhat support
5	Somewhat oppose
3	Strongly oppose
6	Not sure
3	No Response

15. How strongly would you support or oppose a state prescription drug discount program in Nevada for low-income persons if it requires new state funding?

<u>%</u>	
33	Strongly support
33	Somewhat support
12	Somewhat oppose
10	Strongly oppose
0	Not sure
12	No Response

Utilities

16. In your opinion, do your electric, gas, and phone rates seem reasonable to you or not? (Circle the appropriate response for each).

	Rates are reasonable	Rates are not reasonable	Not sure	No Response
Electric Rates	33%	57%	9%	1%
Gas Rates	37%	41%	13%	9%
Phone Rates	45%	44%	9%	2%

17. In the past three years, would you say your electric, gas, and phone bills have increased, decreased, or stayed about the same? (Circle the appropriate response for each).

	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same	Not sure	No Response
Electric	85%	1%	11%	2%	1%
Gas	73%	*	11%	6%	9%
Phone	65%	5%	27%	2%	1%

18. How difficult is it for you to understand each of the following types of utility bills?

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not too difficult	Not at all difficult	Not Sure	No Response
Electric	15%	31%	46%	1%	6%	1%
Gas	13%	29%	42%	3%	4%	8%
Phone	17%	28%	44%	*	9%	1%

19. If you had a complaint about your energy/utility bills and service, where would you turn for help in getting your complaint resolved? (Check ALL that apply)

- %
- 15 The Better Business Bureau
 - 29 The Attorney General's Bureau of Consumer Protection
 - * Police
 - 5 City Council member
 - 6 County Commissioner
 - 61 The Public Utilities Commission
 - 14 Other: (specify) _____
 - 0 Not sure
 - 1 No Response

20. To what extent do you agree or disagree that there should be stronger consumer protections against unfair or deceptive acts and practices by service providers for Nevada utility consumers?

- %
- 69 Strongly agree
 - 25 Somewhat agree
 - 5 Somewhat disagree
 - 1 Strongly disagree
 - 1 No Response

21. How strongly do you support or oppose Nevada maintaining energy assistance programs to help low-income residents pay their energy bills?

- %
- 44 Strongly support
 - 42 Somewhat support
 - 9 Somewhat oppose
 - 3 Strongly oppose
 - 2 No Response

22. Which of the following best describes your opinion about the current Universal Energy Charge collected monthly from utility customers in Nevada to help support the Nevada Fund for Energy Assistance and Conservation program:

- %
- 34 The universal energy charge is about right
 - 17 The universal energy charge is too high
 - 1 The universal energy charge is too low
 - 40 The universal energy charge should be collected from large business and industrial customers only, not residents
 - 8 No Response

Transportation

23. How often do you personally drive yourself somewhere for shopping, groceries, work, appointments?

<u>%</u>	
64	Every day or almost every day
18	3 or 4 times/week
9	1 or 2 times/week
4	a few times a month or less
4	Never – I do not drive at all
2	No Response

24. If for some reason you were no longer able to drive your car, would it be a major inconvenience for you, a minor inconvenience for you, or not an inconvenience at all?

<u>%</u>	
79	Major inconvenience
15	Minor inconvenience
3	It would not be an inconvenience at all
3	No Response

25. If for some reason you were no longer able to drive your car, which of the following people would be willing to drive *you* to the places you needed to go? (Check ALL that apply)

<u>%</u>	
56	Spouse or partner
40	Children
1	Mother/father
*	Grandparent
13	Other relatives/family
43	Friend(s)
6	Coworker(s)
25	Neighbor
10	Someone else: _____
4	No Response

26. If for some reason you were no longer able to drive, how would you get to the places you need and want to go? (For each type, please check ✓ yes if you would use it, no if you would not use it, or not available if you don't have this kind of transportation in your area.)

		Yes	No	Not Available	No Response
a.	Public transportation (bus, trolley, subway)	49%	14%	25%	12%
b.	Taxi	46%	29%	6%	19%
c.	Senior service van/shuttle	69%	9%	10%	12%
d.	Van/shuttle for those with disabilities	41%	20%	12%	27%

If you checked, 'NOT AVAILABLE' for each of the alternative types of transportation listed in the above question, please SKIP TO QUESTION 28.

27. If for some reason you had to use any of the alternative forms of transportation mentioned in the previous question to get somewhere, how easy or difficult would each of the following be for you:

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not too difficult	Not at all difficult	Not applicable	No Response
a. Getting to a stop or a station	21%	27%	22%	12%	6%	11%
b. Finding out the schedule or hours of operation	6%	17%	38%	23%	4%	12%
c. Getting information about the routes	6%	16%	38%	24%	4%	11%
d. Finding and utilizing disability van or shuttle services	9%	21%	31%	14%	13%	13%
e. Finding and utilizing senior van or shuttle services	9%	23%	32%	17%	9%	11%

28. In the past two months, how frequently have you: (For each, check ✓ appropriate box)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than Once a Month	Never	No Response
a. Driven a car	78%	14%	1%	1%	4%	3%
b. Gotten a ride with someone	3%	13%	7%	26%	41%	11%
c. Used public transportation	1%	1%	1%	5%	82%	11%
d. Walked to some place	9%	13%	9%	16%	43%	10%
e. Taken a taxi	*	*	2%	11%	76%	11%
f. Used Senior or Community Van	*	*	*	1%	88%	10%
g. Used transportation services for those with disabilities	*	*	*	1%	88%	10%

State Economy and State Services

29. Would describe the Nevada's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

<u>%</u>	
15	Excellent
63	Good
17	Not so good
2	Poor
3	No Response

30. How important is it to you that Nevada maintain current levels of funding for state and human service programs such as health care and social services for children, low-income people, older people, and people with disabilities even if you may not currently be eligible for these services?

<u>%</u>	
65	Very important
27	Somewhat important
4	Not too important
2	Not important at all
3	No Response

31. Like many states, Nevada is facing difficult economic choices in the coming months as the governor and the state legislators try to balance the state budget. One approach to balancing the budget is to impose cuts on state programs and services. Which of the following state funded services or programs would you support or oppose cutting in order to balance the state budget?

		Strongly support cutting	Somewhat support cutting	Somewhat oppose cutting	Strongly oppose cutting	Not sure	No Response
a.	Health care and long-term care for older persons and people with disabilities	4%	6%	18%	64%	4%	5%
b.	Kindergarten through 12 th grade education	6%	14%	19%	51%	6%	5%
c.	Higher education, i.e. community colleges, universities, technical training	10%	24%	26%	28%	7%	5%
c.	Highway and road maintenance and construction	4%	18%	35%	34%	5%	4%
d.	Public safety, courts, and jails	6%	15%	31%	38%	6%	5%
e.	State grants to municipalities and counties for fire and police protection, senior centers, parks and recreation	7%	15%	32%	38%	5%	4%
f.	Mental health facilities & programs	4%	16%	32%	38%	7%	4%
g.	Other: (specify) _____						

About You

The following questions are for classification purposes only and will be kept entirely confidential.

D1. What is your 5-digit zip code? WRITE IN YOUR ZIP CODE _____

D2. What county do you live in? _____

D3. Do you own or rent a home?

<u>%</u>	
82	Own
11	Rent
4	Neither
3	No Response

D4. What is your current marital status?

<u>%</u>	
59	Now married
17	Widowed
17	Divorced
1	Separated
3	Never married
3	No Response

D5. What is the highest level of education that you completed?

<u>%</u>	
4	Less than high school
20	High school graduate or equivalent
42	Some college or technical training beyond high school
16	College graduate (4 years)
15	Post-graduate or professional degree
4	No Response

D6. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

<u>%</u>	
26	Employed or self-employed <u>full-time</u>
10	Employed or self-employed <u>part-time</u>
55	Retired and not working
3	Other such as homemaker
3	Unemployed and looking for work
4	No Response

D7. Do you have access to a personal computer at home, at work, or some other place?

<u>%</u>		D7a. If YES: Do you have access to the Internet or the ability to use online services such as America Online (AOL)? (n=691)		
71	Yes →	91%	Yes	1% Don't know
25	No	7%	No	1% No Response
4	No Response			

D8. What is your race?

<u>%</u>	
90	White or Caucasian
3	Black or African American
2	Hispanic, Spanish, Latino
1	Asian
1	Native American or Alaskan Native
1	Other: _____
2	No Response

D9. What was your annual household income before taxes in 2003?

<u>%</u>	
4	Less than \$10,000
13	\$10,000 to \$19,999
14	\$20,000 to \$29,999
11	\$30,000 to \$39,999
12	\$40,000 to \$49,999
19	\$50,000 to \$74,999
20	\$75,000 or more
8	No Response

D10. Are you male or female?

<u>%</u>	
52	Male
47	Female
1	No Response

D11. What is your age as of your last birthday? _____ years

<u>%</u>	
28	50-59
49	60-74
21	75+
1	No Response

Thank you for completing this survey. Please use the postage-paid envelope and return it no later than July 9, 2004 to State Member Research, AARP, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049.

AARP

Knowledge Management

For more information please contact Jennifer H. Sauer (202) 434-6207