BEYOND THE STRATEGY

WILDES FINANCIAL STRATEGIES

NEWSLETTER

WRAP UP 2026 WITH CLARITY

The start of June means we're approaching the halfway point of 2026. It's amazing how fast the year is flying by! Now is a great time to pause, reflect, and assess your financial progress so far this year.

Below are some key areas we recommend you look over to assess your financial health and ensure you're on track for a strong finish to the year:

1. **Goal Progress:** Review the goals you set for yourself back at the beginning of the year. Are you meeting the benchmarks you set? If not, what adjustments can you make to help you get back on track?
2. **Spending & Budgeting:** Review your recent spending habits and compare them to your monthly budget. Are there opportunities to create greater margin and help you live below your means?
3. **Investments, Savings, & Giving:** Check in on the contributions you are making to retirement accounts, emergency funds, and charitable causes. Are you maximizing contribution and donation opportunities based on your stewardship goals?
4. **Debt Management:** Evaluate outstanding debts and repayment strategies. Can you accelerate payments or reduce interest costs?
5. **Life Changes:** Consider any recent or upcoming milestones, such as career changes or large purchases, that may impact your financial plan.

Conducting a personal mid-year check-in allows you to evaluate where you stand, celebrate milestones you've achieved, and make adjustments as needed to stay aligned with your goals. And as always, our team is ready to support you throughout your financial journey. Reach out to your Financial Advisor to explore your financial progress in greater detail or to address any questions that may arise during your check-in.

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2026 MID-YEAR MARKET REVIEW

As we approach the midpoint of 2026, the markets have rewarded patience so far this year while also reminding investors that uncertainty is a permanent feature of investing. The first half of 2026 has been marked by resilient economic growth, moderating inflation, periods of heightened volatility, and continued enthusiasm surrounding innovation and productivity-enhancing technologies.

Economic & Interest Rate Landscape

The U.S. economy has remained more resilient than early-year consensus forecasts suggested, supported by steady consumer spending and a healthy labor market. Inflation has continued to trend lower, though it remains above the Federal Reserve's long-term target. As a result, policymakers have maintained a cautious, data-dependent approach to interest rates.

This environment has reinforced the importance of disciplined financial planning, prudent borrowing, and maintaining flexibility amid changing economic conditions.

Equity Markets

U.S. equity markets delivered generally positive results through the first half of the year. Corporate earnings, ongoing investment in artificial intelligence, and improving productivity supported market performance. While technology-related sectors continued to lead, participation broadened at times beyond the largest companies. Periodic volatility and elevated valuations in certain areas of the market served as reminders of the importance of diversification and valuation discipline.

Fixed Income & Cash

Higher interest rates have continued to create meaningful opportunities for income-oriented investors. Bonds and cash equivalents have provided attractive yields while helping support portfolio stability. Fixed income has remained an important source of both income generation and risk management, reinforcing its traditional role within diversified portfolios.

Volatility & Key Risks

Geopolitical tensions, fiscal concerns, and uncertainty surrounding the future path of inflation and monetary policy contributed to intermittent market swings during the first half of the year. While these developments influenced short-term sentiment, investors who remained focused on long-term fundamentals were generally better positioned than those reacting to headlines.

Looking Ahead

The insights gained for the beginning of 2026 reinforces a familiar lesson: successful investing depends more on preparation than prediction. Markets will continue to evolve as economic data, policy decisions, and global events unfold. Regardless of the environment, disciplined financial stewardship that is grounded in diversification and quality will remain one of the more reliable paths forward.

EXPLORING THE FUTURE: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOCIAL SECURITY FUNDS RUN OUT?

"Social Security is the United States' most important social insurance program. It provides at least half of income for about four in 10 beneficiaries, and more than 90% of income for one in seven beneficiaries. Social Security also is the nation's oldest and largest anti-poverty program, keeping about 20 million older Americans and one million children out of poverty.

Why is it critical to revise this vital program? According to the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Office of the Chief Actuary and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the Old-Age and Survivor Insurance (OASI) Trust Fund—the source of the program's retirement benefits—is forecast to exhaust its funds in 2033."

https://www.brookings.edu/articles/fixing-social-security-blueprint-for-a-bipartisan-solution/

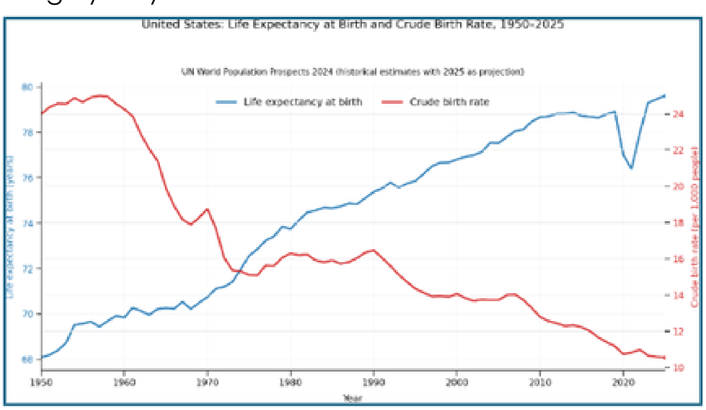
You may have seen recent headlines warning that Social Security (officially the Old Age, Disability and Survivors Insurance, or OADSI) could deplete its trust fund reserves as early as 2030. For many of you who rely on these benefits for monthly cash flow, that news can feel unsettling—or even alarming. In this article, we'll focus on the facts and outline practical steps to help you prepare with confidence.

Why is this happening?

A number of factors are contributing to Social Security's projected shortfall, but two stand out:

1. Americans are living longer
2. Fewer people are entering the workforce

As shown in the chart below, average life expectancy has increased from 68 in 1950 to nearly 80 today. While this reflects the strength of modern healthcare, it also means the average recipient now collects benefits for nearly 20 years, up from roughly 14 years in 1950.



Today, more than 69 million Americans—about one in five—receive Social Security benefits, supported by approximately 184 million workers, or just 2.7 workers per recipient. For comparison, that ratio was 3.5 workers per recipient as recently as 2000.

This imbalance continues to widen as longer lifespans and declining birth rates reduce the number of new entrants into the workforce, while the number of beneficiaries grows. The workforce is expanding at about 1% annually, while the number of Social Security recipients is growing closer to 2% per year.

Additional pressures, including a declining native birth rate and reduced workforce participation from immigrant communities, have further limited the number of contributors to the system. The result is a growing mismatch: more recipients are drawing benefits for longer periods, while the worker base supporting them grows more slowly. This dynamic has steadily drawn down the Social Security trust fund, which is currently projected to be depleted by 2032.

What this all means

1. **Your benefits will NOT STOP.** Program Recipients will continue to recieve benefits after 2032, albeit at a reduced rate. Right now, the projected decrease in benefits is approximately 22%, meaning recipients will continue to receive about 78% of their benefits. For a recipient receiving $2,000 a month in benefits, this would result in a payment of approximately $1,560 per month.
2. **This is NOT inevitable.** Congress can still make changes to the program to prevent this from happening. While social security is often referred to as the "third rail of policy (referring to instant political death for anyone who touches it), there are changes that Congress could make to the Social Security program. Specifically, Congress could change the way that social security taxes are collected (currently 12.4% of earned income up to $184,500), and/or change the minimum age for receiving benefits. For example, removing the $184,500 wage limit would generate roughly another $100 billion per year, which would cover the shortfall for the time being. There are numerous plans to address this shortfall, with republicans advocating a reduction in benefits while democrats have advocated for increasing taxes and thus revenue. The solution is probably a version of both, but elected leaders need to make this a priority and find the middle ground.
3. **You Need a Plan!** If you are a retiree or close to retirement, please contact your financial advisor immediately to ensure that you are prepared for these changes, should they happen.

SUMMER FINANCIAL READINESS: ENJOY THE SEASON WITHOUT THE STRESS

The warmer months often bring more time outdoors, vacations, family activities, and well-deserved opportunities to relax and recharge. While summer is a season for enjoyment, it can also come with increased spending if you're not prepared.

Just like any other aspect of your life, your finances benefit from a little seasonal planning. Taking a proactive approach now can help you stay on track while still making the most of everything summer has to offer.

Here are a few simple tips to help you prepare your finances for the summer months ahead:

- **Plan for Seasonal Spending:** Summer often brings extra expenses, like travel, dining out, and fun activities. Setting a seasonal budget can help you enjoy these experiences without overspending.

- **Review Your Cash Flow:** With kids out of school or changes in your everyday routine, your monthly expenses may shift. Take time to review your income and expenses to ensure everything stays balanced.

- **Be Mindful of Energy Costs:** Warmer weather can mean higher utility bills. Simple steps like adjusting thermostats or improving home efficiency can help manage costs.

- **Keep Saving and Stewardship Goals on Track:** It's easy to ease up on saving and giving during the summer, but maintaining consistent contributions and donations can help you stay aligned with your long-term goals.

With just a little preparation, you can enjoy the summer season confidently, knowing your Wildes Financial Strategy is still on track.

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CONTACT US

843-485-4371

WildesFinancial.com

info@wildesfinancial.com

625 Church St.
Georgetown, SC 29440