

## Arise Citizens' Policy Project Report

January 10, 2002

**Make your plans now to attend Arise Lobby Day on Thursday, Jan. 31.** We will start our day in the Capitol Auditorium, across the street from the State House. That's an accessible site for our members who have trouble walking. You hikers are welcome to park at St. John's AME Church on Madison at Ripley or on Union Street south of Adams Street.

**Lobby Day is a wonderful opportunity** to bring new folks who have never walked the halls of the Legislature. Legislators tend to welcome the invitation to eat this well at a reception!

### **Arise Lobby Day Thursday, January 31 State Capitol Auditorium**

- 9:30 Registration
- 10:00 Issue briefing
- 11:30 Visit legislators to invite to reception
- 12:00 Legislative Reception, Capitol Tunnel
- 1:30 Press conference
- 2:00 Membership meeting in the State House
- 3:00 Adjourn

#### **Religious leaders back tax reform –**

## **Can faith beget tax fairness?**

**Top leaders of Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches in Alabama** issued a "unified call for tax reform" on the steps of the Capitol yesterday. Standing before a banner that said "Faith and Fairness," they reviewed their points of agreement:

We agree that concern for and ministry to the poor is a particular Christian concern, rooted deeply in Scripture.

We agree that Christian communities, as part of their concern for the poor, must be willing to confront the realities which create and maintain poverty.

We agree that the tax structure in Alabama unfairly taxes those who live below the poverty level, while allowing significant advantages to the most wealthy of the state.

We agree that the tax structure thus constitutes an instance of economic injustice which must be exposed and challenged by people of faith.

We agree that any changes to the tax structure are the responsibility of the Executive and Legislative branches of state government. The governor and the State Legislature are called upon by the Christian denominations to take action to enact a fair and just tax structure for Alabama.

The statement grew from a series of meetings convened by Bishop Henry Parsley of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama. Participants were the leaders of the five judicatories that have passed resolutions calling for tax reform: Bishop Robert E. Fannin of The North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church and Bishop Larry Goodpaster of the Alabama-West Florida Conference; the Rev. Mike McLemore, President of the Baptist State Convention; and the Rev. Terry Newland, Executive Presbyterian of the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley.

Although the tax reform meetings to date have included the churches that have passed tax reform resolutions, they hope to enlist other communities of faith. For example, resolutions have now been passed by priests' councils of the Roman Catholic Church in Mobile and Birmingham.

**Rep. John Knight plans to re-introduce Arise's Income Tax Reform Plan** in mid-January. The plan would provide tax relief for low- and middle-income taxpayers, provide \$290 million in funding for schools, and require the wealthiest one percent of taxpayers to pay their fair share.

#### POVERTY QUIZ

**Q: What would help a family of four at the poverty line more: taking the sales tax off groceries, or passing the Knight Income Tax Reform Plan?**

A: The Knight Plan would add \$730 to their family budget; ending the grocery tax would add \$490 a year.

## ***School lawsuit falls victim to activist Supreme Court***

**The school equity and adequacy case may soon come to an end. The State Supreme Court is expected to rule unfavorably to Alabama school children.** The Court, acting on its own to bring up the issue without any party requesting it, has re-opened the liability order in the school case that was issued and finalized in 1993. The liability order declared that children in Alabama have a right to an adequate and equitable education – and that the current system was unconstitutionally inadequate.

The Court has now asked the lawyers in the school case to respond within 30 days to a set of questions. The Court appears to be ready to state – against what it said on four previous occasions – that the liability order was never final. The Court has now made its position clear that there is no equal protection under the State Constitution, removing a primary basis for the original ruling in the liability order. The Court appears to be ready to nullify the liability order... and the current efforts of

the State Board of Education to achieve funding adequacy may soon be left without the pressure of the courts.

When the courts decide that the Alabama Constitution has no provision for a fair and adequate education, we must either increase funding at the legislative level or re-write the Constitution.

## ***New grants***

**The Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham** will soon award Arise Citizens' Policy Project a \$30,000 grant to support our policy analysis work. We are delighted to receive this grant, the first large grant we have ever received from an Alabama foundation.

We have also received grants to support our organizing work: \$15,000 from the **Mercy Mission Fund**; \$40,000 from the **Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock**; \$30,000 from **The Needmor Fund**; \$4,795 from **Democracy South**; \$1,583 from **Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger**; \$15,000 from **The Ford Foundation**; and \$7,750 from **The New World Foundation**.

## ***New faces***

**Kwamena Blankson** joins us next week as a policy analyst on tax and economic issues. A Birmingham native, Kwamena is a graduate of Harvard University and the University of Alabama Law School. He comes to us from a youth advocacy program in Massachusetts.

**Brooks Cotton** will be with us through April as an intern through the University of Alabama School of Social Work. She is a Birmingham native and will work with the policy team.

## ***New hats***

**Mary Weidler** has been named **Team Leader for the team of ACPD policy analysts** that will now include Karen Brown and Kwamena Blankson.

**Pres Harris** is new **Team Leader for the organizing team**, which includes Stan Johnson and Nathan Morgan.

## ***A few words from Kimble –***

**During a recession, how do states react to losing revenue?** In the last recession in the early 90s, states on average made up about half the revenue shortfall by cutting spending, and the other half by raising taxes. That's an insight I brought back last month from the Center on Budget's conference on state fiscal issues. Of course, businesses argue that this is no time to raise their taxes.

**So it's amazing that Gov. Don Siegelman** could get legislators to agree that our schools could not handle a \$160 million tax cut after the 6.2% proration of last year. Remember that last year the main

opposition to our tax reform plan was that “schools don’t need more money. There’s plenty of money if they would just use it right.”

**Never have I felt the overwhelming presence of the big-money interests** as I did at the special session in December. At one point, I sat calculating that a tax cap they had just approved would benefit companies worth over \$286 million, leaving giant corporations paying a smaller tax rate than a smaller competitor. It occurred to me that every Alabama business worth over \$286 million probably had a lobbyist sitting in the room. So while I was disappointed that the session ended with business avoiding paying its fair share, it’s a marvel that they agreed to increase business taxes at all.

**We hope that this year, fewer legislators will argue that schools don’t need more money.** It’s an election year, and we need to frame our tax plan as an election issue:

- \$ In a recession, parents raising children need a tax break;
- \$ our schools *do* need more funding; and
- \$ the wealthiest one percent should pay their fair share.

**With peace,**

***Kimble Forrister***

Executive Director

## ***Calendar***

**Birmingham** “Poverty, Public Transportation, and YOU,” a workshop on transportation, 6:30 pm Wed Jan 23, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church. For info call Stan Johnson, 833-3301 or [stan@stanjohnson.com](mailto:stan@stanjohnson.com).

**Tuscaloosa** tax reform workshop 6:00 pm Th Jan 24, University Presbyterian Church, 1127 8<sup>th</sup> St. For info call Nathan Morgan, 394-3923 or [nathanarise@home.com](mailto:nathanarise@home.com).

**Prattville** tax reform workshop 7:00-8:30 pm Th Jan 24, First United Methodist Church. For info call Pres Harris, 832-9060 or [presarise@aol.com](mailto:presarise@aol.com).

**Arise Lobby Day** Th Jan 31. See Page 1 for details.

**Birmingham** issue preview 7:00 pm Wed Feb 6, Prince of Peace Catholic Church, 4600 Moss Creek Blvd, Hoover. For info call Stan Johnson, 833-3301 or [stan@stanjohnson.com](mailto:stan@stanjohnson.com)

**Birmingham** constitutional reform workshop 7:00 pm Th Feb 7, Birmingham Unitarian Church. For info call Stan Johnson, 833-3301.

**“Reclaiming the Dream”** on Feb. 15-16 will be a workshop, march, and rally on transportation issues, particularly on the federal level. Friday workshops by the Surface Transportation Policy Project and the Center for Third World Organizing; Saturday march to the Capitol. For info call (334) 717-5464 or e-mail [ReclaimingTheDream@envirocitizen.com](mailto:ReclaimingTheDream@envirocitizen.com)

**Arise health caucus** 10:00-noon Tu Mar 5, Bell Building conference room, Montgomery

## ***Legislative update***

**Public transportation:** Sen. Rodger Smitherman has introduced **SB 34**, which would amend the state constitution to allow gas taxes and license fees to fund public transportation. The constitution only allows gas taxes to be spent on road and bridge construction. Rep. Perry Hooper will introduce a House bill to do the same thing. This year Hooper’s bill will not include the 2% floor it had last year. Last spring Hooper’s bill died in committee on a 7-6 vote.

**Landlord-tenant bill:** The Alabama Law Institute has convened a series of meetings to negotiate a landlord-tenant bill acceptable to all parties. The Law Institute is highly regarded in the Legislature and we expect a proposal we can endorse. However, they do not expect to have a bill ready during this legislative session.

**Moratorium on executions:** A coalition of groups working for a moratorium on executions is organizing a more coordinated effort by religious leaders. The major legislative focus is to get senators on the Judiciary Committee to support Sen. Hank Sanders’ moratorium bill, **SB 186**. Although the committee held hearings on the bill last spring, it was never brought to a vote.

**Constitutional reform:** Mary Weidler has prepared a side-by-side comparison of the two bills that call for a constitutional convention, Rep. Mac Gipson’s **HB 106** and Rep. Todd Greeson’s **HB 7**. We will send you one if you send us a self-addressed envelope, or you can find it at [www.arisecitizens.org](http://www.arisecitizens.org).

**Child care:** Discussions have been underway with FOCAL (the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama) and Voices for Alabama’s Children to determine a legislative proposal on child care. One concern: state funding for child care has not increased since 1988; another is that, with inflation, some low-wage families’ income now exceeds the income limits for child care subsidies.

## ***Contributors surpass match goal***

**\$43,835. That was our year-end total of member contributions to the Ford-Mott match campaign.** We needed to raise \$40,000 to match \$100,000 in grants from the Ford and Charles Stewart Mott foundations. Between January and December our generous members reached and surpassed the goal. Here is the list of contributors we haven’t yet thanked – those who gave between July and December. Thank you for your commitment to fairness in Alabama government.

David Adkisson  
Jim Allen  
Anne W. Amacher  
Will and Laura Anderson  
Connie Arnwine  
Bill Baird  
Bertha Battey  
Robert E. Battles  
Sr. Patricia Bauch  
Chris and Jeff Bennett  
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Dirk Forrister and Mimi  
Turnipseed  
Calli Patterson and  
Kimble Forrister  
Marilyn And Phil Garrett  
Kevin Garrison  
Jim Gatling and Debbie  
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Melissa Oliver  
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Bob Parker  
Louise G. Parris  
David and Anne Patten  
Tommy and Alice  
Patterson

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Louise Pittman  
Mary Lynn and Walter  
Porter  
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Martha Woolverton

John Leo Wright  
Carole Wright  
Eldon Zimmerman

Canterbury Episcopal Church Women, Tuscaloosa  
Church Women United, Mobile  
Edmundite Southern Missions, Selma  
Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Selma  
Prince of Peace Catholic Church, Birmingham  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul Council, Mobile

***A conversation overheard....***

"Kimble? It's Dave."

"Hey, Dave. How's it going?"

"Fine. Listen, is ACPP a 501 (c)(3) non-profit?"

"That's right. Contributions to ACPP are tax-exempt."

"Okay... I don't know why I didn't think of this before, but Anne's company will match contributions she makes to a 501(c)(3). Which brings me to Question #2: Will those foundations match her company's contribution, too?"

"Yep, that's right. Both contributions go to the match."

"And that's what – 2.5 to 1?"

"Exactly. Yep, since you put it that way, **your \$1,000 contribution to ACPP will mean that we get \$7,000!**"

"Right, Kimble. Don't count on getting \$1,000, but we'll fill out this form and get her company to send you a matching contribution."

"Sounds great. Thanks!"

*Well, Anne not only got the form filled out, but she doubled what she gave last year... so ACPP received four times as much from Anne and Dave this year. Do any more Arise members work for employers that match their contributions?*