

*This newsletter made possible by the Needmor Fund*

Vol. 5, No. 5

August 23, 2002

## ***Annual meeting September 7 in Birmingham***

### **Arise Annual Meeting**

**9:30-3:00 Saturday, Sept. 7**

**St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Birmingham**

*Bring \$5 for lunch.*

Make plans to bring a friend to our Annual Meeting on Sept. 7!  
Registration will start at 9:30 and the meeting will start at 10. This year our host is **St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Birmingham.**

***Directions from I-65:*** Take I-65 to I-459 just south of Birmingham. Take I-459 towards Gadsden/Atlanta for about 5 miles. Take Hwy 280/ Mtn. Brook exit and turn left onto Hwy 280. At the second traffic signal, turn right onto Summit Blvd. (as if going to the Summit). Summit Blvd. becomes Crosshaven Drive. St. Stephen's is on your right at 3775 Crosshaven Dr.

***Directions from downtown Birmingham:*** Take Hwy 280 east. Turn left on Overton Rd. at yellow blinking light. Overton will curve through a neighborhood. Watch for a traffic signal at Crosshaven Dr. Turn left onto Crosshaven and take an immediate right into St. Stephen's parking lot.

**Members will decide Sept. 7 –**

# Few new issues proposed

**Only four proposals were submitted** by the July 31 deadline for additions to our issue agenda for 2003. One of those was Project Hope's case for our continuing to work on the moratorium on executions. Three new proposals were submitted:

- ! Arise's Health Caucus submitted a proposal for work on health care.
- ! Greater Birmingham Ministries proposed automatic restoration of voting rights for ex-felons.
- ! Centro Cultural Latino, which just submitted its membership form, proposed that we work on alternative documentation for driver's licenses.

**All seven issues now on our agenda will also be considered.** According to our by-laws, we may choose no more than seven issues. All member groups were invited to propose an issue by writing a short persuasive article for the newsletter. Here are the four articles we received:

## Protect Medicaid and CHIP funding

*Submitted by Arise Health Caucus*

- ! Maintain funding for Medicaid at current program levels.
- ! Maintain state funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to draw down maximum federal dollars allocated for Alabama.
- ! Protect the initial investments we've made in Medicaid and in CHIP. Do not lose the programs and progress we've made.
- ! Ultimately the state must reform its tax system to ensure stable funding for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

## **Restore ex-felons' voting rights**

*Submitted by Greater Birmingham Ministries*

We at Greater Birmingham Ministries along with others in Alabama have formed the Alabama Task Force to Enfranchise Ex-Felons. Our mission is to change the laws that, in effect, deny voting rights to ex-felons.

As you know, only two states permit inmates to vote: Maine and Vermont. Each state has developed its own process of restoring voting rights to ex-offenders, but most of these restoration processes are so cumbersome that few ex-offenders are able to take advantage of them.

In Alabama, ex-offenders are required to provide a DNA sample to the Department of Forensic Sciences as part of the process of regaining the right to vote.

As we begin our work, we would like to get the support of Arise in our effort to move this state to recognize the right to vote of all sectors of our population.

## **Alternative documentation for driver's licenses**

*Submitted by Centro Cultural Latino*

Alabama needs to allow the use of alternative forms of identification to obtain a driver's license. It is a matter of public safety and fairness. The inflexible requirement of a social security number means that hardworking taxpayers cannot take the driving test nor buy insurance. In addition, the state's woefully inadequate transportation system forces people to break the law or pay high taxi costs just to get to school, work or medical appointments. Permitting the use of alternative forms of identification – such as consular i.d.s, passports, or birth certificates – would help more people qualify for a valid license and for automobile insurance. This measure would increase public safety while reducing the cost of uninsured drivers.

*Note: Arise's Board voted to recommend that the membership approve this alternative documentation issue for endorsement, rather than making it an issue for member action.*

# Maintain support for the moratorium

*Submitted by Darrell B. Grayson for the board of Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty. Project Hope is applying for Arise membership. Its board members live on death row.*

The recent rulings of the United States Supreme Court regarding mental retardation and jury override have sent a clear and resounding message to capital punishment states that the death penalty, in its present form, stands on shaky ground. Those death penalty states which have these particular issues, Alabama being one of them, have to prepare for a hard fight with the state and need the time which a moratorium would allow.

It goes without saying that Project Hope's first priority is abolition and understands that a moratorium could be instrumental in abolishing the death penalty in Alabama. Once the moratorium is in place, the true scope of the injustices inherent in this system and the awesome waste of taxpayers' money, that should be assigned to education and poverty needs, would reveal themselves.

In 2000, Alabamians for a Moratorium under the leadership of Alabama Arise called for a three year moratorium on executions. At this critical time when, because of the recent rulings, there is more hope than ever, while at the same time in Alabama there is an unprecedented number of inmates who have run out of appeals, we need the courageous leadership of Alabama Arise more than ever. The support of Alabama Arise for a three year moratorium bill which supports mandatory DNA testing, a Public Defender's Office, and competitive funding for defense attorneys can make the difference between passage or not.

The moratorium is truly a poverty issue as it allows an examination of the death penalty, which affects the poor. It is the poor who are its target because they cannot afford adequate representation. It is the poor who lose public funds when the vastly more expensive "solution" of state killing is chosen over life without the possibility of parole, which studies show costs less.

It is for all of these reasons and because Alabama Arise, together with its member organizations, has political clout that we urge you to keep the moratorium as one of your targeted concerns.

## ***A few words from Kimble –***

**What is Arise's most-often-quoted tax fact?** It may be “the bottom 20% of Alabama taxpayers pay 11.5% of their incomes in state and local taxes, while the top 1% pay only 3.6%.” Those numbers will soon change.

**We will soon help release the new “Who Pays?” study** from Citizens for Tax Justice and the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. The first “Who Pays?” was published in 1996 and was based on 1995 data. We expect to make the most of the new release – and we sure hope it comes out before the election! It's good that the \$4,600 income tax threshold has been mentioned on the campaign trail, but the lop-sided tax burden is the other half of the story. That is, it wouldn't hurt much to have a low threshold if the tax burden at \$4,600 was light. But it's not. It's the highest in the country on minimum-wage workers.

**Check out the new search capability on our website!** I searched for “tax reform” at [www.arisecitizens.org](http://www.arisecitizens.org) and pulled up 20 articles. Alabama Arise, our sister organization, doesn't have this feature at [www.alarise.org](http://www.alarise.org). (Not that we really want to get any competition going between these organizations!)

**Hope you can join us at the Annual Meeting.** Can you believe we're starting into our fifteenth year? We're glad you're on board with us! It's going to be a great year.

**With peace,**

***Kimble Forrister***

**TANF Reauthorization Under the Magnifying Glass**, a United Way conference, 9 am - 4 pm Sept. 19, Birmingham Jefferson Civic Center, featuring Pamela Holcomb of the Urban Institute. For information, call (205) 458-2056.

## ***Board nominees***

Arise member groups elect the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting.

Those marked with an \* have not served on the board before.

### ***Nominees representing low-income groups:***

**Nancy Brennan**, United Presbyterians of Wilcox County, Inc.

**Jocelyn Cash**, Montgomery Transportation Coalition

\***Callie Greer**, Jubilee Community Center, Montgomery

**Lawton Higgs**, Church of the Reconciler, Birmingham

**Arzula C. Johnson**, Rosebud Action Community Center

**Fannie Mitchell**, Loveman Village Resident Council, Birmingham

**Alice Paris**, Federation of Southern Cooperatives

**Curstine Smith**, Women As Strength Program (WASP), Birmingham

**Deborah Thomas**, FOCAL

**Felicia Thompson**, Neighborhood Services, Inc., Birmingham

**Charles Williams**, Citizen Lead Education and Poisoning Prevention (CLEPP), Birmingham

### ***Representing other groups:***

**Lynn Douglas**, Church and Society Committee, North Alabama Conference, United Methodist Church

**Tom Duley**, Urban Ministry, Birmingham

**Carol Gundlach**, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Montgomery

**Mary Jones**, Greater Birmingham Ministries

**Sr. Kathy Navarra**, Sisters of St. Joseph, Pine Apple

\***Judy Roy**, Birmingham Independent Living Center

**Ruthie Sherrill**, University Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa

**Jackie Tipper**, League of Women Voters of the Shoals

## ***Four groups apply to join Arise***

**At the Annual Meeting, member groups will vote** on whether to admit four groups that have submitted a Memorandum of Understanding to join Arise:

**Autauga County Family Support Center**, Prattville

**St. Vincent's Hospital**, Birmingham

**Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty**, Atmore

**Centro Cultural Latino**, Birmingham

## Calendar

**There are still two more local listening sessions.** These strategy conversations feed into the Annual Meeting. You would be welcome at either of these:

**Huntsville:** 7 pm Tu, Sept 3, Holy Spirit Catholic Church, 625 Airport Rd

**Tuscaloosa:** 6:30 pm Th, Sept 5, University Presbyterian Church, 1127 Eighth St. Call Nathan Morgan at (205) 394-3923 for more information.

**Mobile Arise Cluster** will meet 7 pm Tu, Sept 10, Providence Hospital, Conference Room 1. Call Nathan Morgan at (205) 394-3923 for more information.

## Arise files *amicus* brief in payday loan suit

**Arise has filed its first *amicus* brief** in the appeal of the payday loan lawsuit. Tuscaloosa attorney Steve Gregory offered to write the *amicus curiae* ("friend of the court") brief for us *pro bono* (free).

**Gov. Don Siegelman and Attorney General Bill Pryor** have made strong statements as they announced that they would appeal the case to the Alabama Supreme Court. They are appealing Judge Eugene Reese's finding that payday loans are not loans and are not subject to the Small Loan Act.

**Arise continues to welcome stories you hear** about people's experiences with payday lenders. A few lenders are not abiding by the limits the court set on payday loan fees. If you hear stories, contact Karen Brown at (800) 832-9060 or [karen@alarise.org](mailto:karen@alarise.org)

### Our budgets to grow for 2003

**At the Annual Meeting members will be asked to approve an ambitious budget** for the fiscal year that began July 1. We propose to increase member giving substantially as we reduce our reliance on national foundations. Members will approve budgets for both Alabama Arise and Arise Citizens' Policy Project, but to give you the big picture, here are combined totals for both:

<b>Income</b>	<b>Actual 2002</b>	<b>Proposed 2003</b>
Member groups	48,152	67,572
Individuals' gifts	43,305	57,200
Foundation grants	429,809	420,217
Honoraria	1,075	250
Interest income	2,571	6,000
<b>Total income</b>	<b>524,911</b>	<b>551,239</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>		
Personnel	262,965	336,819
Office expenses	58,014	77,326
Travel	22,717	31,358
Contracts	78,145	101,536
Legislative reception	3,362	4,200
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>425,202</b>	<b>551,239</b>

## Arise issue proposals for 2003

Proposal	What it would do	Opposition	Support
<b>Tax reform</b>	If governor names a tax reform commission early in 2003, Arise will shift focus from Knight Plan to aspects of comprehensive reform: lift income tax threshold above poverty line, take sales tax off groceries, and increase property taxes to fund education and General Fund needs.	ALFA opposes increasing property taxes. Republicans may argue for a revenue-neutral plan that is fairer but won't help the budget crisis or improve the education system.	Both candidates for governor want fairer taxes, but say little about more revenue. Nine religious bodies have passed tax reform resolutions. BCA, VOICES have it high on agenda.
<b>Landlord-tenant bill</b>	After years of struggle between Arise and the Realtors, this year Rep. Laura Hall asked the Alabama Law Institute to draft an independent, objective bill that would define the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants.	Realtors' Association is participating in the Law Institute's committee, but might still oppose the final proposal. A powerful opponent; gets calls in.	Arise tends to be the only group pushing for this bill. Students in college towns and senior citizens, often victims of slumlords, could be organized to help.
<b>Public transportation</b>	Arise proposes to remove the prohibition in the 1901 Constitution against spending gas taxes on public transportation. In 2002 we supported a pilot plan to allow gas taxes to be used for public transportation in Jefferson and Shelby Counties.	Road and bridge builders, Dept. of Transportation, Association of County Commissions, truckers, and legislators who don't want to give up their pork.	People with disabilities, senior citizens, business leaders (e.g. Governor's Commerce Commission), transit authorities, those who can't afford cars.
<b>Moratorium on executions</b>	Whether persons end up on death row has too much to do with whether they can afford a lawyer – and their race. We call for a three-year moratorium to allow study of the fairness of the system.	Senators on the Judiciary Committee were unwilling to pass this bill. Probably want to be considered tough on crime.	Passionate United Methodists, Roman Catholics, Episcopalians. Bishops will speak out. Sen. Hank Sanders eloquent on it.

<b>Constitutional reform</b>	Arise supports ACCR proposal for constitutional convention, delegates elected from each legislative district; we prefer a man and a woman from each district.	Right-wing ideologues alienate the mainstream; mainstream may fear that reform means high taxes.	Chambers of Commerce. Wide citizen support. Siegelman says convention; Riley says commission.
<b>Child care</b>	Alabama left \$10 M on table in Washington for lack of \$3 M match; has not increased state funding since 1988; low-income subsidies stuck at level that can drive small providers out of business.	Big obstacle here is the budget crisis in the General Fund, which will also hurt Medicaid, CHIP, etc.	FOCAL and child care providers; VOICES and other children's advocates.
<b>Unfair lending practices</b>	Some Black Caucus members and Arise have blocked bills to legalize the payday loan industry since 1998. 2002 "compromise" bill would lower APR only to 429%. Lawsuit to legalize them now on appeal.	As payday lenders get richer off backs of desperate borrowers, their clout grows in Legislature. Two legislators are lenders.	AARP led opposition until 2000, but we rejected their compromises this year and last, so Arise and Black Caucus blocked passage.
<b>Health care</b>	Arise Health Caucus proposes we push for Medicaid and CHIP funds. Outreach has worked: Record number of kids now covered. Tight budget = funding cuts.	Again, obstacle is budget crisis. Tobacco funds, CHIP surplus running out. Medicaid cut for '02, '03.	VOICES, Medical Association, hospitals, clinics, children's advocates.
<b>Voting rights for ex-felons</b>	Ex-felons who have served their time and "paid their debt to society" face a cumbersome process to restore their right to vote. It should be restored automatically.	Some Republicans consider these Democratic votes. Would either oppose this or trade it for a voter I.D. bill.	Civil rights groups, human rights advocates, DEMOS (new democracy group) see this is as winnable.