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Newsletter printed on recycled paper with 100%
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Save these dates

Fri Jan 30 – “Borrowing to Make Ends Meet,” workshop on credit-card debt sponsored by Alabama Watch, Montgomery (*see below*).

Sat Jan 31 – Advocacy training sponsored by Alabama Watch. Call (800) 449-7515 for details.

Jan (date TBA) – Legislative budget hearings for General Fund and Education Fund. Agency heads and educators will present their financial needs and spending plans. The hearings are open to the public, and Arise urges members to attend. Check the website in early January for schedule.

Tue Feb 3 – Legislative session opens.

Wed Mar 4 – Arise Lobby Day. Our January newsletter will include a lobbying guide and an updated Legislative Directory. Plan now to spend March 4 having lunch and discussing Arise issues with your legislators!

Congratulations!

Hard work is paying off for Esther Brown, Project Hope, the *Greene County Democrat*, and all the other advocates who have persuaded 14 local governments in Alabama to adopt a moratorium resolution on the death penalty. In late November, our own Eutaw, Ala., became the 100th municipality in the U.S. to adopt such a resolution!

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December 4, 2003

Don't give up now –

A simpler tax plan can pass in '04

Arise believes that cuts are not the answer to Alabama's budget crisis. State services are already among the lowest-funded in the nation, and our children are already suffering from the 2003 cuts in health care and child care. Just as “a hungry child cannot learn,” a child with a toothache cannot learn. We must move forward, not backward.

We do not believe that the vote on September 9 was a rejection of all tax reform. Granted, tax increases will always be a tough sell. But we believe that a simpler, more modest plan can win voter approval. We recommend starting with the Knight Plan to restructure the income tax, because it would lift the income tax threshold above \$4,600. The Knight Plan is more than a cut for poor and middle-income families. It is built on a broader understanding of fairness: *cuts for taxpayers who pay too much, and increases for those who pay too little.*

We also propose a modest increase in property taxes. Even ALFA appears ready to support a modest increase, although it will be difficult to negotiate a plan acceptable to both ALFA and the utility companies. The point is to create a modest plan with less “sticker shock” for taxpayers in any category. Incremental change – one step at a time – will be easier for voters to swallow.

ACTION: Contact Gov. Bob Riley and your legislators and urge them to make another attempt at tax reform. You can e-mail Riley from his website, governor.state.al.us. You can find your legislators' phone numbers at alarise.org.

Earmarking is a problem. If we simply increase income and property taxes, the revenue gain would all go to education. Problem is, our greatest needs are in the General Fund, where ALL Kids insurance was cut for 4,000 children.

We suggest a four-year earmark of the new revenue from tax reform. We propose going to the voters with a \$600 million plan, with half earmarked to education and half to health care. (The health care funding would be tripled or

[Turn to “Simpler plan” on Page 2]

Arise launches “Jubilee Amendment” drive

Around the world, the Montgomery bus system is a symbol of freedom and equality. Yet, nearly 50 years after the Bus Boycott, the Alabama Department of Transportation provides no funding for public transit. Alabama Arise and three partner organizations have launched a new statewide campaign to fill that gap before the Golden Jubilee of the boycott in December 2005.

Arise, along with the Montgomery Transportation Coalition (MTC), Citizens for Transit (Birmingham) and Greater Birmingham Ministries, is conducting a petition drive urging the Legislature to pass a “Jubilee Transit Amendment.” Such a measure would

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A few words from Kimble –

We have very mixed feelings about the No Child Left Behind Act. On the one hand, students from low-income homes do fall behind when their teachers have low expectations, so it's good to challenge schools to close the gaps of race and income. On the other hand, it's shortsighted to think that such gaps will ever be closed if we don't address other factors like health care. Research tells us that 40% of kids in low-income households suffer from untreated tooth decay, compared to fewer than 8% in middle-income families. How many students are sitting in Alabama classrooms today, unable to concentrate because of a toothache?

Compared with a \$5,000-per-student education budget, it doesn't cost much to come up with about \$300 per child, the state portion of the ALL Kids insurance plan. (The federal government matches the \$300 with \$1,200.)

Sadly, we're going the other way. We've trimmed the ALL Kids rolls because of the funding crisis. We've also cut the education budget. The professional development budget for teachers, which can have a bigger impact on student performance than class size, has been cut to zero.

Ron Nored, the board president who hired me, died too young. Ron could drive a board agenda; he believed in genuinely hearing poor people's concerns; and his supervision as I got my feet wet in Alabama was grace incarnate.

We were also sad to learn that Bailey Thomson had died at 54. Bailey was the respected leader of the constitutional reform movement.

With peace,

Simpler plan

[Continued from Page 1]

quintupled by federal matching funds.) At the end of four years the new Legislature and governor would assess whether a 50-50 split still made sense.

Accountability measures should also accompany the new funding. As Riley has said, voters don't want to pay more for the "same old same old." If we streamline the dismissal process for teachers and increase the share of health insurance premiums paid by state employees and teachers, we'll save money.

Jubilee Amendment

[continued from Page 1]

permit the use of a portion of gasoline tax revenues to fund public transportation.

The campaign targets the idea of a constitutional amendment but is not tied to a particular piece of legislation, says Jon Broadway of MTC. "Our goal is to let the people speak on this vital issue. We're hoping their collective voice will inspire the Legislature to act with conviction and creativity. We're open to any good plan for funding public transit."

Arise board president Jocelyn Cash, also of MTC, adds, "When the Fiftieth Anniversary of the boycott brings the world to Alabama, we want to show them we're not just looking backward but moving forward."

The funding gap dates to a 1952 amendment prohibiting the use of gas taxes for any purpose other than building and maintaining roads and bridges. This 50-year-old earmark reflects an era when constructing farm-to-market roads was a top economic priority for Alabama. As transportation needs have shifted, funds have remained locked in place.

Today, the absence of transit service keeps thousands of Alabamians from meeting basic needs. From county to county, says Jon Broadway, the problem takes its toll: A small-town mom who doesn't own a car can't keep her factory

job in a neighboring community. A rural diabetes patient has to skip his doctor's appointment. In cities and suburbs, overdependence on private vehicles creates air pollution, traffic congestion, and other health and safety hazards.

Arise and the other sponsoring groups will be working throughout the coming year to collect signatures for the initiative. Individuals can download the petition from the Arise website and distribute copies in their communities. In addition, organizations are invited to endorse the Jubilee Transit Amendment by contacting Arise policy analyst Karen Brown, karen@alarise.org.

How does the new voting rights law work?

The Legislature's recent decision to allow restoration of voting rights for eligible ex-felons was a victory for advocacy groups. Efforts have now shifted to informing Alabamians about the law's requirements.

The law, effective Sept. 25, 2003, excludes persons convicted of any of 13 specified crimes (mostly sexual in nature, but including murder and treason). Eligible applicants must have fulfilled all terms of their sentence (paid fines or fees, completed probation or parole, etc.). The Board of Pardons and Paroles grants a Certificate of Eligibility to Register to Vote to applicants who meet all requirements in the law, and applicants who are denied a certificate must be told why.

To request an application for a Certificate of Eligibility to Register to Vote, contact:

**The Board of Pardons and Paroles
500 Monroe Street
Montgomery, AL 36130-3019
(334) 242-8700**

Ineligible ex-felons can seek a pardon by requesting a clemency application from the Board. To learn more, contact AVERA (Alabama Voter Education and Registration Alliance: 334-263-4088) or the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union: 334-265-2754, ext. 205).

Campaign snapshots

For an organization geared to informing and challenging the Legislature, the 2003 tax reform referendum was an opportunity to channel our efforts in new directions. Arise wants to learn as much as possible from this process so that we can turn the tide next time. As one board member noted at our recent board retreat, “We don’t have to convince the other 68 percent of voters – we just need one more than half!”

We conducted a Tax Reform Activity Survey to find out how organizations around the state worked to build grassroots support for Amendment One. Thanks to all those who have sent their responses. Here’s a sample of comments so far:

We printed our own materials, including sample letters to legislators. ... We wrote letters to legislators during church.

I gave presentations to my church school, a women’s group of my church, and to my beautician and co-workers. I was fired-up from Arise presentations. ... We are ready to step up to the bat again.

We created our own ... postcards to send to all our friends and acquaintances, plus short summaries to give out to all our clients who came in to show them why we need the tax reform and how it will affect them.

More emphasis on TV ads pointing out source of opposition and why they oppose reform and higher taxes, compared to supporting organizations.

I will write a letter to Gov. Riley to request that he continue his efforts.

One last response...

Q: *What change would you like to see in the next tax reform package?*

A: *Want to see it pass!*

New strategy expands members’ role

Looking forward from Arise’s 15th birthday in November, member groups have approved a new issue-selection process that matches long-term policy goals with short-term strategies. The change, recommended by the Arise board, will give member groups a bigger role in carrying out the organization’s action agenda throughout the year. Representatives from 37 member groups voted unanimously to adopt the plan at the Nov. 1 annual meeting.

“Changing state policy is a long-term process,” says Arise organizing team leader Pres Harris. “Now, instead of focusing members’ energy on bringing issues up for a new vote every year, we can take a longer view. Identifying the outcomes we want to achieve will help us map out the steps for getting there.”

The new process grew out of discussions at a board retreat in late October. That meeting was part of a six-month review of Arise’s mission, policy goals and working strategies, led by Robbie Ross-Tisch of the Management Assistance Group in Washington, D.C.

“Arise has worked successfully for 15 years to establish itself firmly at the table where state policy decisions that impact poor people are made,” Ross-Tisch noted in her report to the board. “A core question for the organization at this critical juncture is whether ... it should devote most of its energies during the next era of Arise’s organizational life to building the capacity to more rigorously influence the policy that is being made at that table.”

Building on this 15-year history, the board recommended a strategic framework that includes 15-year and 3-year policy outcome goals. Under the new plan, annual membership meetings will focus on assessing progress toward the 3-year goals and crafting community-based action plans. Listening sessions through-

out the year will take on the new function of shaping local strategies.

The 15-year outcome goals identify large-scale changes in state law and policy that will benefit low-income Alabamians. The six goals are:

- A fair, adequate, transparent and simple state tax system
- A restorative criminal justice system rather than a punitive one (including abolition of the death penalty)
- A new state constitution that reflects Arise’s core values
- A state budget that provides equitable and adequate services (education, child care, health care, transportation, etc.) for low-income people
- Wages, benefits and policies that provide economic security for all working people in the state
- Safe, affordable, accessible and adequate housing for all Alabamians

The 3-year outcome goals provide benchmarks for achieving the long-term goals. In order of priority, the six goals we want to reach within 3 years are:

- Tax reform
- Adequate funding for health care (Medicaid, ALL Kids), child care and education
- Increased state funding for public transportation
- A landlord/tenant law
- A moratorium on executions
- Reform in one type of predatory lending (such as mortgage lending, refund anticipation loans, or car title pawns)

Arise staffers are currently conducting issue briefings and developing one-year work plans that reflect the new short- and long-term strategic goals.

“This framework,” notes Arise policy team leader Mary Weidler, “makes more room for member input beyond selecting issues. We’re looking forward to a more solution-oriented process.”

Thanks to our donors!

The contributors listed here gave to ACPP between September 9 and November 30. Thanks in advance to all who are including Arise in your year-end giving!

Our financial picture includes good news and bad news this fall. It's good news that despite the economic downturn, our members are giving more in our 15th year than ever before. It's bad news that we had to draw deeply – about \$30,000 – from our modest reserves to pay for an expanded tax reform campaign over the summer.

We're stealing time this fall from our usual work to re-examine what's working, what's not, and where we need to invest more energy. Our board and staff are re-dedicating themselves to an agenda that has tax reform at the top and other long-term policy goals below.

We hope you will do the same: re-order your priorities, with a place of importance for your advocacy through Arise and your financial support of our efforts. With momentum building for tax reform, how much is the work of Arise worth to you?

Alexander City Junior Service League
Mary Beth Allison, Mobile
Ginny and Lewis Archer, Alexander City
Bill Baird, Auburn
Sr. Patricia Bauch, Tuscaloosa
Susan S. Benke, Tuscaloosa
Marcia M. Bystrom, Muscle Shoals
Hank Caddell, Mobile
Joyce M. Church, Birmingham
Sonja Cobb, Birmingham
Paula Copeland, Birmingham
Robert Cowan, Montevallo
Peggy Crittenden, Daphne
Rev. Jay Croft, Birmingham
Gabriele Darch, Auburn
Ilse Diasio, Birmingham
Bill Dixon, Florence
Lynn Douglas, Birmingham
Tom and Doreen Duley, Birmingham
Edgewood Presbyterian Church,
Birmingham
Edmundite Southern Missions, Selma
Carolyn Edwards, Huntsville
Dan Filler and Alisa Hoffman, Birmingham
Anne Fitts, Selma
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Montgomery
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Ron Gilbert, Douglasville, Ga.
Sr. Marilyn Graf, Mobile
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Susan Hamill, Tuscaloosa
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Raymond and Fiona Watts, Birmingham
Penny Weaver, Montgomery
Ruth L. Wright, Auburn
Eldon Zimmerman, Birmingham

In Memoriam

Rev. Ron E. Nored Sr. Aug. 30, 1960 – Oct. 11, 2003

With great sadness we mark the passing of Ron Nored, a founding board member and later board president of Alabama Arise. The following was written by another former Arise board president, Robert Montgomery, for the Greater Birmingham Ministries website (www.gbm.org):

Rev. Ron Nored was the pastor of Bethel AME Church in Ensley and the Executive Director of Bethel Ensley Action Tasks, Inc. (BEAT), a

church-neighborhood partnership that has rebuilt hope and constructed 45 houses in Sandy Bottom, now the Sandy Vista neighborhood.

Most people, including me, would have said that it would have been easier to pick up mountains and throw them into the sea or to raise the dead or heal lepers than to revitalize a place like Sandy Bottom. But there it sits, wearing the name Sandy Vista, a name that only barely discloses the higher reality that there is an actual human community alive

and well there today, where there were only hollow hopes and decaying houses before.

For Ron, the neighborhood was everything, and it always had the final say. He had his own opinions of what should happen, of course. He never once shrank back from being an outspoken leader and pushing hard for his own ideas. But once the neighborhood made a decision, that was it. There was only one direction left: the neighborhood's, and Ron was its tireless spokesman.