

P. O. Box 1188
Montgomery, AL 36101
Street address: 207 Montgomery St. #810
Montgomery, AL 36104
www.arisecitizens.org
Newsletter printed on recycled paper with 100%
post-consumer content.

Calendar notes

Fri-Sat Jan 23-24 – grassroots leadership workshop on Popular Education (“Pop Ed”), sponsored by Alabama Organizing Project (AOP) and led by Arise staff. Auburn location TBA (call Pres Harris at 334-832-9060 for details).

Sat Jan 31 – citizen lobbyist training hosted by Alabama Watch, 9:15 am to 4:30 pm at the First Baptist Church Caring Center, 305 S. Perry St., Montgomery. The free training will include a preview of 2004 legislative issues by a panel of legislators, an Arise presentation on building relationships at the State House, and sessions on using media effectively and other advocacy skills.

March 4 – Arise Lobby Day! Get ready by reading Melissa’s article at right and reviewing your new Legislative Directory. As the session gets underway in February, watch your mail for our new Fact Sheet series on Arise issues.

Welcome, Zack Carter –

Arise’s new organizer for south Alabama! Zack grew up in Mobile and has worked for 15 years as a labor activist in Alabama and Pennsylvania. He served as president of the Shipbuilders’ Union Local 18 in Mobile in 1988-89. He holds a master’s degree in education and is currently an adjunct instructor of history at Alabama State University.

Newsletter made possible by the Ford Foundation
Vol. 7, No. 1

January 9, 2004

Come lobby with Melissa – **Raise your voice for a better Alabama!**

By Melissa Oliver, Arise Legislative Coordinator

When people talk about lobbyists for special interests at the State House, they often picture corporate “hired guns” striking deals with legislators over expensive dinners. But that’s not the only way the process works. My job at Arise is to lobby for legislation that furthers our organization’s special interest – improving the lives of low-income Alabamians. I don’t have an expense account. The only influence I can use comes from the strength of Arise’s membership, policy analysis and vision of a better Alabama.

When I retired from Human Resources a few years ago, I talked to several of the big lobby firms about a job. One of them said, “Sure, we can get you some cigarette contracts!” I replied “Oh, no. I couldn’t lobby for tobacco – I had too hard a time quitting smoking.” He looked at me strangely and said, “Melissa, that’s *not* the point.” But, as I thought about it, I realized that *was* the point. I could not just be a lobbyist for hire. I can only work for something I believe in!

I applaud Arise members for belonging to an organization they believe in. However, it’s one thing to believe in something – it’s another to do something about it. That’s where lobbying comes in.

Many voices

When I give talks to civic groups, I like to do an exercise called “Many Voices.” I

walk out from behind the podium and say quietly, “Speaking together we make a difference.” Back at the microphone, I ask how many heard me – usually just the front few. Then I repeat what I said, adding “But you couldn’t hear me because I was only one voice.”

Next, I tell them that, on the count of 3, I want everyone to say in a normal voice, “Speaking together, we make a difference.” I count, and the words rise. “Now, stand up,” I tell them, “and say it in a *loud* voice – 1, 2, 3” The message fills the room.

This exercise illustrates how advocacy works. When calling on lawmakers to support Arise issues, it’s important to:

- Speak on cue – respond to action alerts in a timely manner;
- Speak together – identify yourself as an Arise member;
- Speak the same message – convey the key points on an issue;
- Speak loudly – express your personal conviction;
- Speak to the people who can do something about the issue – your legislators;
- Then ask others to join you and repeat the process.

If you follow these steps, your voice will be heard!

[Turn to Page 2]

A few words from Kimble –

“Citizen lobbying” is all about relationships. You may have heard me tell the story before: An aide to an Atlanta congressman spoke at a North Alabama Presbytery hunger conference a few years ago. He bragged on the Atlanta members of Bread for the World who met with his boss soon after he was elected. He said the group had enough political savvy not to promote a piece of legislation in their first meeting with the representative. Instead, they introduced themselves and Bread. They understood that building a relationship was most important.

Here’s the other aspect: making sure we make our calls. What is it that makes the difference between tossing your Arise newsletter on the desk and actually making the call? We pledge to make some changes at the staff level: We want to define more winnable goals. We plan to trim back the number of requests for action. Member groups have asked for ready-to-print alerts they can include in newsletters or handouts.

But what happens at *your* end? Does it help to have an advocacy “buddy” with whom you touch base, to be sure that you’ve each made your call? Or does it help to simply put the alert by the phone so that you call first thing? Is there a pep talk you give yourself before you call? If you have an idea that’s worth sharing, let us know and we’ll print them in future newsletters.

In the meantime, how’s this for a New Year’s resolution? “I will contact my state lawmakers four times between now and the end of May.” A few hundred of us with that goal can leverage great things!

With peace,

Raise your voice

[continued from Page 1]

Your voice won’t be effective unless it reaches the right ears. Do you know who your State Representative is? Your State Senator? If you don’t know, find out immediately! You can do so by using the map in the Arise Legislative Directory that was mailed with this newsletter, by calling the Democratic or Republican Party headquarters in your area, or by visiting www.legislature.state.al.us. Click on “Find your Representative or Senator,” then click by ZIP code or enter your address.

It’s been my experience that legislators are very nice people – they love Alabama and Alabamians. They want to know your concerns. They want to do the right thing – even though they sometimes need help deciding what that is. And they all have one thing in common – they want to be reelected!

To get reelected there are two main things they need: money and votes. Most Arise members do not have large sums of money to contribute to the causes they support. But they *do* have – or can pull together – networks of people who believe as they do and who vote. Together, these voices can send a strong message.

There are many ways you can get your message across. I refer to these ways as Call, Write and Go.

Action step #1 – Call!

The easiest way to send your message is by telephone. You can call from home (even in your pajamas). Ideally, you will get to talk directly to your legislator. Before calling, write yourself an informal “script” that covers the following:

- Give your name and where you live.
- Identify the general reason for your call – for example, “I’d like to talk with you about children’s health insurance.”
- Mention that you’re a member of Arise and that our members are interested

in the issue (to the legislator, this means voters!).

- Give the specific piece of legislation, including the bill number if there is one.
- Make it personal – tell a brief story or say why it matters to you.
- Ask them to vote for the bill and where (mentioning a particular committee or floor vote suggests that you may even be there to watch!).
- Give them a reason to vote this way.
- Thank them in advance.
- Be courteous – never lose your temper.

If you get a secretary or answering machine, that’s okay – legislators do get their messages. In this case you must be even briefer – leave out the story.

Here’s an example: “This is Melissa Oliver from Dadeville. I’m a member of Alabama Arise. In the meetings we have been holding with people throughout this district, we have discussed the Children’s Health Insurance Program and its importance to uninsured Alabama children, particularly those in this area. We would like you to vote Yes on the CHIP Bill – House Bill 306 – tomorrow in the Health Committee at 1:00. On behalf of Arise and these children, thank you for your help on this critical matter.”

This brief message covers all nine points mentioned above. Get other people to call with a similar message (not exactly the same – legislators do not pay much attention to form letters or form calls). Remember that every phone call is the “tip of an iceberg” – for every person who takes the time to call, there are many others who share the caller’s concerns. Think of the number of votes you will portray if 10 people – or even 20 – call on the same issue.

Action step #2 – Write!

Legislators *do* read letters. You can send a letter to any legislator by using the following address: Alabama State House; Montgomery, AL 36130. The Arise

[Turn to Page 3]

Jan. 30 forum will examine rise in credit card debt

Alabama families facing dwindling paychecks, job loss and high basic costs have become prime targets for predatory lenders. Such lenders charge exorbitant rates and fees for credit cards, payday loans, and sub-prime mortgage loans. ACP, along with Alabama Watch and the New York-based Dēmos project, is hosting a forum on “Borrowing to Make Ends Meet” to examine the impact of these lawful but harmful financial services.

The breakfast meeting will be held on Friday, Jan. 30, from 8:30 am to noon at the Hilton Garden Inn Montgomery East, 1600 Interstate Park Drive in Montgomery. Admission is free, but space is limited.

ACPP policy analyst Karen Brown will moderate the panel discussion. Panelists will include Barbara Evans, executive director of Alabama Watch, a statewide consumer advocacy organization; and Tamara Draut, director of the Economic Opportunity Program at Dēmos: A Network for Ideas and Action. Also presenting will be a representative from the Montgomery area Consumer Credit Counseling Services organization.

The forum will present new research on the growth of credit card debt over the last decade and its effect on economic security. For example, the recent Dēmos study *Borrowing to Make Ends Meet* found that, during the 1990s, credit card debt for very-low-income families grew by 184 percent. Senior citizens saw their average credit card debt increase by 149 percent in the same period.

Panelists will discuss credit card debt in the context of other high-cost financial services, with policy and advocacy ideas aimed at combating the diverse forms of predatory lending affecting Alabama communities.

We appreciate our donors!

ACPP received gifts from the following people between Dec. 1 and Dec. 31, 2003:

Dot Baker, Birmingham
Kaydee Erdreich Breman, Birmingham
Rafe and Judy Cloe, Birmingham
Paul E. and Emily T. Cosby, West Point
Rev. Frank Covington, Auburn
Robert Cowan, Montevallo
Carolyn Crawford, Birmingham
Mary Cupp, Auburn
Jane DeLung, Lawrenceville
Ilse Diasio, Birmingham
Betsy Dobbins, Birmingham
John and Zippy Doll, Theodore
Donald P. Domico, Selma
Dan and Kathleen Dunne, Birmingham
John Earl, Tuscaloosa
Anne Fitts, Selma
Gail and Bud Gardner, Fairhope
Ron Gilbert, Douglasville, Ga.
Joyce Greathouse, Birmingham
Sue Hall, Opelika
Judith Hand, Birmingham
Dale and Alan Head, Birmingham
Peter Horn, Birmingham
Stan Johnson, Birmingham
Judy Johnson, Montgomery
Rebecca Harbor Jones, Madison
Edward and Ruth LaMonte, Birmingham
Hattie Belle Lester, Birmingham
Ruth Lidell, Camden

Raise your voice

[continued from Page 2]

Legislative Directory includes e-mail addresses for legislators who welcome electronic messages.

Here are a few simple guidelines to follow in letter-writing:

- Use your own words. Form letters are easy to recognize and less effective than personal statements.
- Both handwritten and typed letters are fine.
- Include the same information you would cover in a phone call, as noted above.
- Limit your letter to one page.

As long as you're writing, remember your local newspaper. A letter to the editor will put your issue in the minds of many people. Some will be inspired to write their own letters, supporting your

Hiram Maddox, Mobile
Sr. Mary Maloy, Rochester
Ron Manning, Brierfield
Dorcas Mansell, Birmingham
Agnes McCaster, Oak Hill
Dr. Claudia McDade, Jacksonville
Evelyn Mims, Tuscaloosa
Martha Morgan, Tuscaloosa
Ouida Myers, Montgomery
Leslie O'Neil, Birmingham
Bob Parker, Birmingham
Louise G. Parris, Anniston
Mary Jane Pennington, Mobile
Mike and Mary Jim Quillen, Birmingham
LaVerne Ramsey, Pelham
Alfred Rose, Birmingham
James Rushton, Birmingham
Anne G. Rutledge, Huntsville
James and Amy Sedlis, Birmingham
Jack Shelton, Sterrett
Frederick Shepherd and Lorrin Etko-Shepherd, Birmingham
Floyd Sherrod, Florence
Sr. Judy Smits, Mobile
Lucille Stand, Auburn
Elaine E. Vancleave, Birmingham
Chuck Vedane, Huntsville
Paul and Kathy Vincent, Montgomery
Robert Waldron, Mobile
Mary Weidler, Montgomery
Dr. Tom Wesson, Sr., Tupelo, Miss.
Mary White, Florence
Don C. Williams, Hope Hull
Newell and Mary Witherspoon, Huntsville

points. Legislators regularly read this section to find out what their constituents are thinking.

Action step #3 – Go!

For me, this is the fun part – making your voice more “real” with a face and a handshake. Here are some pointers for getting to know your legislator personally:

- Meet them whenever possible, particularly in their district. Arrange a time to introduce yourself as an active constituent – don't wait until you have an issue to press.
- Go over and speak to them whenever you see them in public – at ballgames, the grocery store, etc.
- Go to meetings where they are speaking – forums, clubs, ceremonies, etc.
- Wear a name tag to every meeting.
- Always tell them your name clearly

[Turn to Page 4]

A legislative session without a plan?

Gov. Bob Riley and legislative leaders are not on the same page as the legislative session approaches. Lawmakers may arrive in Montgomery on February 3 with competing factions arguing over several issues:

- Some want accountability before new funding; others insist funding must accompany reforms.
- Some will look to Band-Aid taxes, many of which are regressive; others want more sweeping, systemic tax reform. The regressive taxes can bring new revenue faster; property and income taxes must go to a vote of the people. Some legislators will fight any tax that doesn't go to a vote of the people.
- Some Republicans, uncomfortable with their vote last summer for the Amendment One tax plan, want to be able to vote against a tax.
- Some will look to gambling or a lottery for new revenue.
- Some want to sit back and watch the fights begin so that the viable proposals can be sorted out from the ones without support. Then they can come forward, undamaged, and support a winnable proposal.

A legislative session without direction is risky. Gov. Riley, we believe, wants new revenue, but he seems to be planning to start out with cuts and accountability proposals. House Speaker Seth Hammett is saying that legislators want a revenue proposal, because they don't want to preside over cuts that would exceed 50% for some departments.

Some pollsters say that voters prefer a "balanced plan" that includes both spending cuts and new revenue. Arise continues to believe that voters would support a tax reform plan that had a modest increase in taxes, a significant improvement in tax fairness, and sound accountability measures.

Arise crafts new landlord-tenant bill

After several failed compromises with the Alabama Association of Realtors and the Alabama Homebuilders' Association, Arise will go it alone this year with its own Alabama residential landlord-tenant bill.

In 1998, 1999 and 2003, Arise negotiated with the Realtors and homebuilders to craft a bill that would satisfy the concerns of both landlords and tenants. However, each year the Realtors' board of directors voted to oppose the resulting bill.

The 2003 bill was drafted by a distinguished committee convened by the non-partisan Alabama Law Institute. Even though representatives from the Realtors and homebuilders had served on the committee, neither group endorsed the balanced proposal.

Arise's new bill is streamlined and straightforward. It outlines basic requirements for dwelling safety and habitability, simplifies the eviction process, and provides remedies for both parties in the event that either violates a provision of the bill.

The new Arise bill requires that:

- landlords make all repairs and do whatever is necessary to keep housing units and common areas in a decent, safe and sanitary condition at all times;
- tenants pay for any repairs, maintenance work or other tasks necessary if they willfully cause a condition that interferes with the landlord's ability to keep facilities habitable;
- landlords give at least a 30-day

written eviction notice and that all actions for eviction, rent, monetary damages and/or other relief related to tenancy be governed by the Alabama Rules of Civil Procedure and the Alabama Rules of Appellate Procedure.

We're currently preparing the bill and will post it on the website soon. You can follow the progress of the bill during the session by signing up for the Arise e-mail discussion list at www.alarise.org.

Raise your voice

[continued from Page 3]

and add a quick memory tag – for example, "My daughter goes to your child's school," "I live in your aunt's neighborhood," or "I enjoyed your speech at the Kiwanis Club last Thursday."

- Invite them to your meeting – but not during the legislative session!
- Help your group arrange a legislative reception and be sure to attend.
- Come to the State House during the legislative session. Tuesday afternoons and anytime on Thursday are the best times to go "Lobbying with Melissa" in the halls of the State House, off the floor, and in the galleries. I can take up to four people at a time, so bring a friend. Call or e-mail Jamie Keith at the Arise office (jamie@alarise.org) to schedule a time during the 2004 session. If you go in February, you'll be a step ahead for Arise Lobby Day (March 4)!

Working with legislators is often slow and frustrating – bringing even a modest policy change to completion can take three to five years. But slow change beats no change!

I think I have the best job in the world. I hope you'll join me at the State House to help our lawmakers learn more about Arise's issues. If we raise our voices together, we *can* make a difference. Come lobby with Melissa!

The faces behind the numbers

We're collecting stories about the impact of budget cuts on low- and middle-income Alabamians. If the state's fiscal crisis has cost you or someone you know access to health care, child care, a job, a school program or any other vital link, we want to hear about it! Call or e-mail Jim Carnes at the Arise office (jim@alarise.org).