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Calendar notes

Tuscaloosa September cluster meeting to be rescheduled

Mobile 7:30 pm Mon Oct 11, USA Library Auditorium, Susan Youngblood Ashmore of Emory University will speak on "The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama." Other speakers in the October series marking *Brown v. Board* and Civil Rights Act anniversaries include Frye Gaillard and Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. Call (251) 432-1638 or visit www.mobileunited.org.

Mobile monthly cluster meeting 7 pm Tue Oct 12 (note date change for holiday), Providence Outreach Senior Center, 35 N. Cody Rd.

Decatur 6 pm Wed Oct 13, St. John's Episcopal Church, Kimble Forrister will speak on "The Gospel mandate to serve the poor – How should Alabama respond?" Other speakers in the "Faith + Politics" series on Wednesdays in October are Susan Pace Hamill, Jim Evans and Alan Parrent. For info, contact (256) 353-9615 or Richard.Lawson@stjohnsdecatur.org.

Auburn 1:30 pm Tue Oct 19, Auburn cluster meeting, Auburn UU Busch Center

Save the date: Feb 15

Arise conference on public policy issues affecting low-income Alabamians. Birmingham Southern College. Stay tuned for details!

Report

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September 23, 2004

A call for 'transparency'

Riley unveils new budget plan

By Ron Gilbert, policy analyst

On August 8, Governor Riley announced a new budgeting process for state government that could open a much-needed window for Alabamians on how their tax dollars are spent. The plan, known as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent) Budgeting, includes a number of the recommendations Arise outlined in a July fact sheet, "Three Tests of Government Accountability" (available online at www.arisecitizens.org).

SMART Budgeting will require state agencies to set specific performance goals, measure their success in meeting those goals and report annually to the public on how their programs have or have not met performance expectations. Plans call for full implementation of the process over a three-year period, with budget requests for Fiscal Year 2005-06 following a simplified version.

ACPP applauds the Governor's plan as an important step toward accountability. The "transparency" measures, in particular, offer a welcome prospect for curbing the hidden dealings that have too long run the show at the State House – and the voter turn-off they've produced. The state budget should be written in a glass house.

The Governor has not yet added adequacy and fairness to his definition of accountability. Until our leaders – and those who elect them – summon the

courage to reform the tax system, Alabama cannot fulfill its accountability for the general well-being of Alabamians.

The SMART plan is the latest effort in three decades of piecemeal fiscal reform for Alabama. In 1976, the Legislature passed the Budget Management Act, which included requirements for planning and performance reports. The Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) has called that measure "one of the nation's best budgeting laws." But,

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Annual meeting outlines 2005 goals, strategies

"Big wins are built of small ones," ACPP executive director Kimble Forrister told members, staffers and board members gathered at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Birmingham on September 11. The annual meeting offered participants an opportunity to assess a frustrating legislative year and lay the groundwork for another round of tug-o'war in the General Fund budget.

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Election Day Petition Drive

On Nov. 2, help us collect signatures on the Jubilee Transit Amendment petition at polling places in your area. See story on Page 2. To volunteer, contact: Ron Gilbert, (800) 832-9060; ron@alarise.org.

A few words from Kimble —

When I was ten, my dad taught me about ambitious goals. As a minister, he challenged Lebanon Road Church of Christ to recruit 1,000 kids for Vacation Bible School. As I recall, they had never had even 200. They didn't reach 1,000, but they did top 700, and the mood was electrifying.

We have mixed feelings about the No Child Left Behind goals. We want every teacher to have a "can-do attitude" that expects success for every child. But it's not right to set a high bar while ignoring, for example, health barriers. How can we expect Jill to score well on the test when she has an untreated toothache? High goals won't overcome that barrier.

We have questions about the Black Belt Action Commission. Gov. Riley wants action, but there are no new resources in sight. How far can unfunded goals take a poverty-plagued region?

We have our own goal-setting struggles at Arise. We set three-year policy goals, but we don't really have the resources to reach them. We plug away in the six chosen areas, but at best we're more prophetic ("speaking truth to power") than effective in passing legislation. We're better at programmatic goals. We said we would do 80 workshops during the tax reform campaign, but we did 179. We wanted to grow from 400 associate members to 1,000, and we reached 1,300.

It's a difficult time to be in the legislative-success business. What are some legislative goals that are real-world achievable and will flex our muscles? How do we build our long-term capacity to achieve the big wins? Our board will consider such questions at its October retreat. Stay tuned!

With peace,

Election Day, Nov. 2, calls Arise to action

Volunteers to collect Jubilee signatures

Arise members and other volunteers will stand outside polling places on November 2 to gather signatures on the Jubilee Transit Amendment petition. As the 2005 legislative session approaches, Arise is calling on lawmakers to commemorate next year's 50th anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by unlocking state funding for public transportation. Co-sponsors of the initiative are the Montgomery Transportation Coalition, Greater Birmingham Ministries and Citizens for Transit (Birmingham).

The campaign seeks a constitutional change because a 1952 amendment makes it illegal to use state gas tax and license fee revenues – the logical source of transit funds – for any purpose other than building and maintaining roads and bridges. As a result, inadequate public transit keeps thousands of Alabamians from meeting basic needs.

Arise believes that public transit is:

- a health and safety issue;
- an economic and social justice issue;
- an economic development issue;
- a cornerstone of Alabama's and the nation's civil rights heritage.

Arise is asking members to support the campaign by:

- making copies of the Jubilee petition (download it from www.arisecitizens.org or call [800] 832-9060);
- identifying key local polling places;
- committing to spend an hour or two gathering voter signatures on Nov. 2 during "high-traffic" hours in the morning and evening;
- enlisting others in your community to "stand for transit" by stationing petitions at least 30 feet outside as many polling places as they can;
- contacting Arise staffer Ron Gilbert (ron@alarise.org or by phone) to let us know what you're planning and how Arise can help.

Last March, we reported on a victory by Mobile Arise members in defending their public transportation in the historically Black neighborhood of Mobile Terrace. Get an update on this success story at www.arisecitizens.org. During their struggle, Mobile Arise members also collected hundreds of Jubilee signatures.

Amendment 2 targets racism in Constitution

Even though Jim Crow lost his legal grip on Alabama decades ago, our Constitution still bears the imprint of segregation and unequal rights. Arise is joining with Greater Birmingham Ministries in support of an amendment that would strip racist language from the document. The proposal will appear as Amendment 2 on the November 2 ballot.

The references at issue include passages in the 1901 Constitution, as well as portions of amendments adopted in the 1950s. For more than a hundred years, Section 256 of Article XIV has declared that "separate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be permitted to attend a school of the other race."

Amendment 111, ratified two years after *Brown v. Board* in 1956, affirmed segregation but also challenged the very idea of public schools: "Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed as creating or recognizing any right to education or training at public expense." Amendment 2 would delete these passages opposing integrated schools. In addition, the amendment would remove all references to the poll tax, which was established in 1901 to keep poor Alabamians from exercising their right to vote.

"These remnants of racism highlight the dire need for constitutional reform," says ACPP executive director Kimble Forrister. "In the meantime, this amendment is an important step in the right direction."

Section 8 update

Voucher legislation remains in flux

By Ron Gilbert, policy analyst

In July, Arise joined with other advocacy groups across the nation in urging Congress to reject the Administration's proposed reductions in the Section 8 housing voucher program. Section 8 currently serves more than 28,000 households in Alabama, and if proposed reductions were implemented, they would result in a loss of program benefits to more than 3,000 families.

The good news is that the House Appropriations Committee has approved a bill that rejects the \$1.6 billion reduction and the plans to convert Section 8 to a "Flexible Voucher" block grant. The Committee bill restores \$1.5 billion to the voucher program.

The troubling news is that the bill does make changes that may be harmful to the program. It requires that housing agency reserves be reduced from the current one month level to a one week level, limiting agencies' abilities to maintain financial stability and to provide uninterrupted services to low-income families. In addition, the bill cuts the administrative fees that housing agencies use to staff and operate the voucher program by \$48 million from the current level. The bill also reduces the appropriation to a number of other HUD programs by 4 percent.

Congress is way behind schedule in passing its appropriations bills. The FY 2005 VA-HUD bill probably won't get finalized until November, or possibly until early next year. It's important that advocates continue to urge both House and Senate members to maintain full funding and program flexibility for the voucher program.

SMART budgeting

[Continued from Page 1]

the non-partisan organization notes, "the Department of Finance never completed the links among planning, budgeting and performance-monitoring so that funding would be based on well-defined state objectives."

In 2000, then-Governor Siegelman proposed and the Legislature approved the use of performance-based budgeting for several state agencies. The plan, however, was only partially implemented. As a result, the public can't know if departments are working effectively. And lawmakers continue to pepper the budget with so-called "pass-through pork" (money appropriated to an agency but used by individual legislators to support special projects in their districts).

In developing his new initiative and helping departments prepare for carrying it out, Governor Riley has drawn on PARCA's long-term research on budgetary practices in Alabama and other states. If successful, SMART Budgeting will enhance the Legislature's and the general public's understanding of how well state programs are doing and provide a realistic picture of Alabama's financial needs. What's revealed in that process can only strengthen the argument for serious tax reform.

To learn more about the development, phase-in and specific provisions of the program, visit www.smartbudgeting.state.al.us

Annual meeting

[Continued from Page 1]

Preserving Medicaid, children's health insurance and child care from further cuts will remain just as urgent in the next session as in the last, cautioned senior policy analyst Mary Weidler. She offered the "conservative" prediction of a \$153 million shortfall in the Medicaid budget for 2005-06 (*see article at right*).

In an effort to balance fiscal concerns with a commitment to justice, members affirmed the six policy outcome goals adopted last year for the remainder of the quadrennium. They are:

- Tax reform
- Adequate funding for health care (Medicaid, ALL Kids), child care and education
- State funding for public transit
- 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)

Members met in small groups to begin the process of devising strategies for advocacy on each issue. ACPP policy analysts will provide updated resource materials in the coming weeks.

Early warning: Medicaid challenges '06 GF budget

By Mary Weidler, policy analyst

Facing a projected shortfall of \$153.3 million for FY 2006, Medicaid Commissioner Carol Herrmann warned participants at one of the Town Hall meetings this fall that "Alabama Medicaid won't exist after 2005, unless we work together." She explained that we have one of the lowest reimbursement rates in the nation and that we cannot make further cuts in Medicaid and continue to comply with federal law.

The biggest factors in Medicaid's increased state budget needs are \$57 million to make up a reduction in the federal matching rate; \$46.8 million for inflation; and \$33.1 million lost as the federal government phases out a previously allowed state transfer of funds.

Commissioner Herrmann anticipates that by 2009 one-quarter of Alabama's population will be eligible for Medicaid, including 43 percent of our children.

We appreciate our contributors!

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Renters' woes? We need your stories!

Alabama Arise is preparing to file a landlord-tenant bill in the 2005 legislative session. Our regular supporters know that Alabama is one of only two states (the other is Arkansas) without any laws defining the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords.

In advance of the session, we're collecting personal stories of Alabama renters who have suffered the consequences of this legal gap. What firsthand information can you or someone you know give us about the following problems in rental housing:

- difficulty in getting the plumbing or hot water fixed?

- trouble getting an air conditioner or heating system in good working order?
- leaky roofs, broken steps, faulty locks or other dangerous situations left unaddressed?
- security deposit "lost" or slow to be returned?

Alabama renters deserve the same protections that renters in 48 other states receive. If you have a personal story that can help us demonstrate this need, contact Ron Gilbert: ron@alarise.org, (800) 832-9060, or by mail c/o the ACPP office. These stories will not be published or cited without permission.