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## Calendar notes

### WORKSHOP

**Mobile** 6:30 pm Mon., Oct. 10, Providence Outreach Senior Citizens' Center, 35 N. Cody Rd. (between Airport Blvd. and Old Shell Rd.) – tax reform workshop followed by panel discussion on impact of Hurricane Katrina on low-income Alabamians.

### CONFERENCES

**“Healing Our Nation,” Montgomery** 8:30 am – 12:40 pm Sat., Oct. 22, Auburn University, Montgomery. ACPD will present seven workshops on social justice issues. Friday and Saturday evening lectures by nationally acclaimed theologians James Forbes and Charles Marsh are free and open to the public. Saturday workshops require pre-registration by Oct. 12, with a fee of \$20. For more information, call Brenda at (800) 832-9060.

**“Justice, Poverty and Public Policy: The Faith Community Responds,” Huntsville** Tues. evening, Nov. 1, First UMC, 120 Greene St. The Faith Coalition on Poverty and Public Policy, along with Interfaith Mission Service, presents keynote speaker Stephen Black of Impact: An Alabama Student Service Initiative. Workshops on health care, public transit, tax reform and constitution reform. Box dinner at 5:15, keynote 6:00, workshops 6:45. Cost: \$5 materials only, \$10 with dinner. RSVP by Oct. 28 – call (256) 539-1203 or visit [www.interfaithmissionservice.org](http://www.interfaithmissionservice.org).

# Report

*This newsletter made possible by the members of Arise Citizens' Policy Project*  
Vol. 8, No. 6

September 30, 2005

## Annual Meeting 2005

# Members adopt '06 legislative goals

By *Jim Carnes, communications director*

**Just days after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast**, the Arise annual meeting gave member groups an opportunity to discuss both immediate and long-term consequences of the storm for low-income Alabamians. Many who attended the September 10<sup>th</sup> gathering at Resurrection Catholic Church in Montgomery are involved in service to Katrina evacuees (*see p. 2*). Their stories lent an added urgency to the day's agenda of policy strategies for promoting the common good.

**“The big lesson from Katrina,” observed ACPD executive director Kimble Forrister**, “is that public policy really matters in people's lives.” It's a lesson that also runs through the new *Alabama Tax & Budget Handbook*, released two days earlier by ACPD and VOICES for Alabama's Children. The rousing editorial endorsement that Forrister quoted from that morning's *Huntsville Times* was the first in a wave of statewide press support (*see p. 2*).

**During the business session**, members approved the 2006 legislative agenda (*see enclosed brochure*) and received a briefing on the fall work plan. Arise is asking members in each legislative district to present the agenda personally to legislators prior to December 15<sup>th</sup>. Arise staff and members will meet with editorial boards across the state to encourage endorsement and coverage of these priorities.

**In other business, four groups were inducted into membership:** Alabama

Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE; Birmingham); First UMC of Albertville, Sunday School Coalition; University of Alabama Student Chapter (Tuscaloosa); and YWCA of Central Alabama (Birmingham). Members also approved a by-laws change to allow admission of new member groups by a vote of the board or the coordinating committee.

**The youth dance troupe Perfecting Praise**, led by board member Callie Greer, wowed the crowd with a special lunchtime performance. Keynote speaker Dr. Johnny Green of White Street Baptist Church and Auburn University reminded listeners that simply respecting a person's dignity has the power to tap unlimited potential. Special guest Benita Melton of the Mott Foundation offered her organization's perspective on the current policy climate. And workshops on citizen lobbying, member recruitment, media messaging and tax reform rounded out the day.

**“When I left home Saturday morning**, I was deeply depressed,” said one North Alabama board member. “But I was a new person when I returned. I am so blessed to be a part of such an organization.”

### Staff position open

**Policy analyst** on tax and poverty issues in Alabama. Requires economic expertise and strong writing skills. Master's degree preferred. Salary based on experience. Health and retirement plan. Affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. Send resume, writing sample to ACPD, Box 1188, Montgomery, AL 36101.

## A few words from Kimble —

**“The Common Good.”** That’s the introductory topic for our new *Alabama Tax & Budget Handbook*. The common good is a concept that underlies state budgets and taxes. It’s a topic we must keep alive as the Gulf Coast rebuilds and people begin to put their lives together. We need to help people understand that neither the public sector nor the private sector can undertake such a huge task alone.

**We need competent governments to plan for disaster response,** to help fund the recovery in ways that no charity can afford, and to provide safety nets that outlast the current generosity of donors. No church is able to fund a food program big enough to replace the food stamp program, nor a health clinic to replace Medicaid, nor child care on a scale to match our state’s subsidies. Such programs require oversight and adequate funding to carry out their missions.

**How can low-income workers survive these high gas prices?** Once again, these increases may squeeze all of us, but they’re most dramatic for people with no room to maneuver. We’re going to regret our dismantling of public transportation, as well as the sprawl that our cars and cheap gasoline made possible.

**We simply must find ways to put more money in low-income workers’ pockets.** We need a higher minimum wage, and we need consumer-friendly credit policies. One profound change would be income tax reform. Look at the chart on Page 24 of your new *Alabama Tax & Budget Handbook*. Families at incomes of \$20,000 and \$30,000 would have \$371 more a year than they have now, if we passed a set of widely favored reforms.

With peace,

## Statewide newspapers agree

# Tax & Budget Handbook a ‘must-read’

The first-ever guide to “following the money” through Alabama’s tax and budget system has garnered editorial endorsements from around the state. *The Alabama Tax & Budget Handbook* was released on September 8 by ACPP and VOICES for Alabama’s Children. ACPP is distributing 20,000 copies of the free publication to individuals and groups upon request.

### Here’s a sample of what the papers are saying about the handbook:

“Surely one of the finest examples of public service in Alabama history is the new handbook on the state’s taxation and budget systems. ... Every legislator ought to read it; in fact, every taxpayer ought to read it.” (*Montgomery Advertiser*, Sept. 19)

“Step by step, like a prosecutor presenting irrefutable evidence against a heinous law-breaker, the booklet walks readers through the process of how the state

spends its money and how it raises the money it spends. ... When you [contact your legislators], ask them if they’ve read the booklet – and if not, why not.” (*Huntsville Times*, Sept. 8)



“*The Alabama Tax & Budget Handbook* ... is a must-read. To *Kill a Mockingbird* it’s not, but its message is no less important.” (*Anniston Star*, Sept. 21)

“[The handbook] is as simple an explanation of state taxation as you’re likely to find. Graphics and cartoons illustrate it.

But don’t let the cartoons keep you from taking it seriously. ... Hurricane Katrina is bringing out the best in Alabamians – empathy for those enduring hardships and willingness to help them. But we ought also to be concerned about those whose hardships are imposed not by nature but by our own government.” (*Decatur Daily*, Sept. 12)

To order the handbook, call (800) 832-9060 or e-mail [brenda@alarise.org](mailto:brenda@alarise.org).

## Member groups provide Katrina relief

**Hurricane Katrina’s impact on Alabama ranged from a direct hit** on the coast to the influx of thousands of evacuees into communities statewide. Many ACPP member groups have been on the front line in both providing emergency assistance and making sure that the ongoing needs of low-income Alabamians are not forgotten in the process. The following are a few highlights – our apologies and gratitude to those we’re unable to mention.

**In the Mobile area,** *Catholic Social Services* is meeting a high volume of requests from displaced Bayou La Batre residents. *Baldwin County Homeless Coalition* is delivering resources and reports that many evacuees are reluctant to enter shelters.

**Inland communities** are also addressing a variety of concerns. The young people of *Butler County Bridges Program* are

assisting low-income evacuees housed at a low-priced Greenville motel and taking steps to prevent an Us/Them response in the community. *Church of the Reconciler* is working to protect the “historically homeless” of Birmingham during the current shift in demand for social services. According to the *Montgomery Transportation Coalition*, the storm has highlighted the inadequacy of both transit and transit information in the city.

**A number of groups are preparing to deal with lasting effects of the disaster,** such as expected increases in domestic violence and mental health issues. As Nancy Brennan from *United Presbyterians of Wilcox County* noted, “I hope Hurricane Katrina will energize Arise and our individual groups to keep our eyes, our work, our commitment on systemic change – to change the policies that have caused centuries-long devastation of the poor.”

### How do you spell “relief”?

By Mary Weidler, senior policy analyst

Congress has delayed for a month its Sept. 16<sup>th</sup> deadline for cutting \$35 billion from programs for low- and moderate-income families, as outlined by the budget resolution measure passed in April. Hurricane Katrina’s historic devastation has apparently made lawmakers hesitant to cut safety net programs that help the neediest Americans in ordinary times, let alone in the wake of a massive natural disaster. In addition to a projected \$10 billion in Medicaid cuts, and as yet unknown cuts in food stamps, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), TANF and numerous other mandatory low-income programs, Congress plans another \$70 billion in tax cuts for the wealthy.

Meanwhile, Congress has already authorized up to \$62 billion for Katrina disaster relief. Most of these dollars are not being distributed through the customary government agency safety net channels, such as Housing and Urban Development, which had proposed \$10,000 vouchers to cover rent for storm victims who lost housing. That proposal was quickly withdrawn, although it had been successfully used after a 1994 earthquake. Instead we have FEMA’s trailer park solution, at an average cost of \$16,000 per family, and accommodations on cruise ships. The relatively few evacuee families who have moved into trailers provided in Alabama state parks find themselves cut off from jobs, public transportation and grocery stores.

Designed for short-term response, FEMA is ill-equipped for ongoing social services. The administration seems reluctant to rely on existing anti-poverty resources, such as Medicaid, and is instead relying on FEMA, which fell under severe criticism for its slow response to the Gulf Coast devastation. Does the administration fear enlarging, even temporarily, programs that it is trying to cut? FEMA has the authority to issue \$26,200 per household for rental assistance and home repairs. Even if only half the displaced households collect, the agency will pay out tens of billions of dollars. But once those dollars are gone, so will be the government’s commitment to help.

The Medicaid authority has negotiated waivers with Alabama, Texas, Florida and Mississippi to aid Katrina victims. The waivers do not cover the additional costs of increased caseloads. A separate bill requiring the federal government to cover these costs (instead of the usual 70 percent federal match) and to freeze 2005 match rates (a \$50 million saving to Alabama) is facing an uphill battle. Senator Sessions is the only Alabama delegate who opposes the Grassley/Baucus bill (S 1716); Artur Davis is co-sponsor of the House version (H 3698). Governor Riley has appealed to Washington for this aid. Without it, Alabama will be hard-pressed to pay the bill.

### Hurricane Katrina

## Will the winds bring a change?

*Note: The following op-ed by ACPP communications director Jim Carnes appeared in several newspapers earlier this month:*

**We in the Alabama Arise family are heartsick at the suffering caused by Hurricane Katrina**, and we applaud every effort, large and small, to relieve it. The storm has sent thousands of survivors into fellowship halls, homes, community centers, hospitals, motels and other places of refuge in Alabama, and many of our organization’s members are on the front lines, providing direct assistance. Public and private resources are being stretched to new limits in communities across the United States. The outpouring of grassroots generosity, self-sacrifice and competence – and the progress that is already being made in dealing with this unprecedented crisis – remind us vividly of what it means to be Americans.

**The images and stories pouring out of the ravaged Gulf Coast also remind us of more painful truths about our nation.** We have demonstrated our capacity to plan, organize and implement massive and timely humanitarian efforts around the world, yet we have now seen corpses floating for days in the streets of an American city. We entrust our safety every day to a network of systems including transportation, health care, flood and fire control, and communication, yet we’ve let our representatives and leaders divert public funding away from our common good. Federal officials have attempted to explain their belated action by calling Katrina’s devastation an unforeseen double

blow, as if a flood can be separated from the storm that produced it. Similarly, some will strive to separate this event from the political, socioeconomic and racial realities that compounded its human costs.

**On the very day that Katrina was striking the coast**, Arise and similar organizations around the country were releasing new poverty statistics from the U. S. Census. The four-year economic rebound since the last recession is lofting the top income brackets ever higher but leaving median household earnings stagnant. Employee health coverage is falling. The number of working people who live in poverty is rising. Before the deluge, these statistics would have been unlikely to nudge Congress off its headlong course toward more tax cuts for the super-rich, cuts to food stamps and Medicaid, and other assaults on low-wealth Americans. We pray that the winds can bring a change.

**Hurricane Katrina has displaced Gulf Coast residents of every race, class, age and condition.** But those left behind for the world to witness have given the most vulnerable – and ordinarily the least visible – among us a human face. It is the face of a minimum-wage worker, a disabled retiree, an unemployed father, a child of a battered mom.

**We must keep these faces before us and before our leaders when the cameras retreat.** Honor their dignity. Help them assess, restore and maintain their physical and

[Continued on Page 4]

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# We appreciate our contributors!

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*We're growing! This summer we saw a 40 percent increase in donors. Every new gift extends our message about the need to change our state's fiscal structure. Each \$50 gift can put The Alabama Tax & Budget Handbook in the hands of 50 more people! ACPP thanks the following individuals and organizations for their generous gifts received between July 25 and Sept. 23, 2005:*

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## Winds of Change

*[Continued from Page 3]*

mental health. Welcome them into adequate schools. Prevent unscrupulous landlords from trapping them in substandard housing. Engage their energy and productivity by providing access to transportation, jobs and commerce. Protect them from predatory lenders waiting to drown them in debt. Stop taxing them deeper into poverty. Guarantee them equal protection under Alabama law. And put the most vulnerable first in line when the rebuilding starts.

**It's a daunting job, and good deeds alone won't get it done.** We need good public policy and visionary legislative action at the federal, state and local levels. Maybe an "act of God" is what it takes for us to invest ourselves and our resources in building the just, equitable and caring society that we like to claim. We must rise up and speak out, renewing our commitment to address the forces that were ravaging our nation long before Katrina revealed them and that will ravage even more harshly in her wake.