Arise unveils 2019 blueprint for change

Automatic voter registration joins priority list

By Chris Sanders, communications director

It was a vote to urge Alabama to break down barriers to voting. Arise members approved automatic universal voter registration as a new issue priority for 2019 during the organization’s annual meeting Sept. 8 at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Montgomery. Nearly 200 members from across Alabama also reaffirmed their commitment to six other issue priorities, including the permanent issues of tax reform and adequate budgets.

Automatic voter registration (AVR) would allow Alabama to save money while registering more people to vote. AVR registers eligible citizens or updates their records electronically when they

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Representatives of the Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham (above) were among the nearly 200 Arise members who assembled at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Montgomery on Sept. 8 to choose our 2019 issue priorities. Thanks to everyone who attended for fueling our movement for a better Alabama!
For 30 years, Alabama Arise has worked to build a better Alabama for all. And for 27 of those years, Kimble Forrister led the charge as Arise’s executive director. Arise supporters gathered to celebrate that work this fall at a dinner highlighting Arise’s 30 years and honoring Forrister, who retired this summer.

More than 150 people came to Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Montgomery on Oct. 13 to reflect on the past and look ahead to the future. Stories focused on Arise’s early days and Forrister’s leadership style, which many speakers praised as diplomatic.

“Thank you, Alabama Arise, for taking a chance on me 27 years ago,” Forrister said. “Just as I hoped, I’ve been able to work with some of the most inspiring people all across the state. I’ve worked with some outstanding board members and a mighty fine staff.”

Cindy Lowry, former Arise board president, said the word “integrity” comes to mind when she thinks of Forrister. “To lead a progressive, relatively small nonprofit organization in a state like Alabama, to consistently bring in funding and move important policies forward while working against huge odds and remain so pure and true to the values of transparency, honesty and morality that this organization represents is a colossal feat,” she said.

In a way, the celebratory night also served as a passing-of-the-torch moment. Attendees honored Forrister for his achievements with standing ovations both before and after his speech, but he and others also showed optimism for the future of Arise under new executive director Robyn Hyden.

“What’s been really reassuring for me is that she’s thoughtful, she’s authentic – not pretentious – and she’s humble,” Forrister said. “And she deeply appreciates Arise.”
Meet-and-greet shows Arise spirit
Dozens turn out from Mobile, Baldwin counties

By Presdelane Harris, organizing director

On a cold, rainy evening Nov. 13, dozens of Arise members from Baldwin and Mobile counties gathered at Dauphin Way United Methodist Church in Mobile with our new executive director, Robyn Hyden. The event was billed as a chance for folks to meet Robyn and hear her speak about our plans for 2019.

But the night turned into something much more important to Arise staff: a chance to hear from our members. Each of the almost 40 people attending introduced themselves, asked questions and made comments about their hopes for Alabama. They talked about how much Arise inspired them. They inspired each other. And they inspired us.

30th anniversary dinner

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Hyden, a former Arise organizer, began her role as executive director in July. Like her predecessor, Hyden was selfless in her remarks, focusing on the breakthroughs she seeks for Arise and the vital role that members play in making them happen.

“The work we are doing together is necessary – we’re bringing hope,” Hyden said. “I believe that together we’ll rise. And if not together, then not at all. Thank you for being together with us, and thank you for your support.”

Gladys Washington, deputy director of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation in North Carolina, spoke on her relationship with Forrister and Arise that dated back to 1990. She, too, highlighted the future of Arise and thanked Forrister for laying a strong foundation for change in Alabama.

“Over that time, Kimble was hopeful when it was sometimes hard to be hopeful,” Washington said. “We are grateful for that hope, and wish Kimble the very best as he moves to the next phase of his life. You leave with the knowledge that Arise will remain on the battlefield for what is right.”

A note from Brenda

By Brenda Boman, development director

Arise members are generous and resourceful people. Here are three smart and easy ways to help stretch your giving dollars further:

(1) Support Arise when you buy on Amazon. Order any Amazon purchases at smile.amazon.com and choose Alabama Arise as the charity of your choice. It’s just that easy! For every $100 you spend, Amazon will donate 50 cents to support our research and education on poverty issues. Fifty cents may not seem like a lot, but it does add up!

(2) Consider a contribution through a tax-deferred retirement savings account. This option is especially useful for our members who are at least 70 ½ years old and drawing income from an account such as a traditional IRA, 401(k), 403(k), 403(b) or Thrift Savings Plan. Whether you itemize deductions or take the standard deduction, up to $100,000 of your 2019 required minimum distribution (RMD) can be tax-free when you give it to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization through a qualified charitable distribution (QCD).

The check must be made payable directly to the charity, but you can have it sent to you and then mail it yourself if you prefer. If you want to take advantage of the tax savings, be sure to apply for the QCD before you take your full RMD for 2019. Please have the check made payable to Alabama Arise. You’ll need our Employer Identification Number (EIN): 63-1186365.

(3) Consider supporting our work through a donor-advised fund. These funds can operate through a Community Foundation or other independent public charity. If you’re interested in this opportunity to maximize your giving, I would be happy to share some useful resources on how to get started. Just email me at brenda@alarise.org or call the Arise office at 334-832-9060. Thank you for making our work possible!
apply for a driver’s license or share information with public agencies in other routine ways. People can opt out if they do not wish to be registered.

Fifteen states, including Georgia, and the District of Columbia have approved a form of AVR, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. All but one offer AVR through the department of motor vehicles, and several provide AVR through other agencies as well. The policy increases voter registration, promotes greater voter roll accuracy, and reduces printing, mailing and personnel costs connected to processing registration forms by hand.

Members also urged Arise to seek to rein in civil asset forfeiture as part of its criminal justice reform work. This practice allows law enforcement to seize a home, car or other property from people who have not been convicted of a crime. Alabamians who cannot afford to hire a lawyer to try to recover the property are especially vulnerable.

Arise will support policies to reduce the burden that civil asset forfeiture and high court fees and fines place on many families living in poverty. Other priorities include state public transportation funding, stronger consumer protections on payday and auto title loans, and reforms to the state’s death penalty process.

Medicaid expansion will be a focus of intense Arise advocacy this year. Alabama’s failure to expand Medicaid to cover adults with low wages has trapped about 300,000 people in a coverage gap. They make too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to get subsidies for Marketplace coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Expanding Medicaid would save hundreds of lives, create thousands of jobs and pump hundreds of millions of dollars a year into the state economy. It also would help keep rural hospitals and clinics open across Alabama.

Arise will continue its long-standing campaign to untax groceries this year. Alabama is one of only three states with no sales tax break on groceries. (The others are Mississippi and South Dakota.) The grocery tax adds hundreds of dollars a year to the cost of a basic necessity of life for families. The tax also is a key driver of Alabama’s upside-down tax system, which on average forces families with low and moderate incomes to pay twice as much of what they make in state and local taxes as the richest Alabamians do.

“Public policy barriers block the path to real opportunity and justice for far too many Alabamians,” Arise executive director Robyn Hyden said. “We’re excited to unveil our 2019 blueprint to build a more just, inclusive state and make it easier for all families to make ends meet.”