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Calendar notes

Summer membership meeting!

Sat., June 23, 10 am to 1:30,
Church of the Reconciler, B'ham.
Agenda: legislative update, tax
reform training, question of giving
individual members a vote at
annual meeting.

**ACPP organizers are preparing
for their summer season of
meetings** around the state – our
goal is at least 25 listening sessions.
We'll continue to build momentum
for the Knight Tax Fairness Plan
through tax reform workshops.
Please contact an organizer for
your area and schedule a meeting!

Pres Harris (Mtgy; E & W Ala.)
Stan Johnson (Bham; Huntsville;
Anniston)
Danny Jones (Bham; Tuscaloosa;
NW & NE Ala.)
Zack Carter (S Ala.)

Welcome, Rebecca!

Rebecca Jackson has joined the ACPP team as a policy fellow for one year. She will be our lead researcher for the Working Poor Families Project, a public policy assessment and reform initiative for which ACPP has been invited to represent Alabama. A Montgomery native, Rebecca has a B.A. in political science from the Univ. of Alabama. She became interested in state politics while still in high school and feels it's now safe to report that she sometimes skipped class to watch the Legislature. You've come to the right place, Rebecca!

Report

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Vol. 10, No. 4

June 1, 2007

Legislative cliffhanger

Deadlock ends, Medicaid bill advances

By Jim Carnes, communications director

As the partisan standoff that locked up the Senate calendar back in March stretched on through May, any prospects for legislation on Arise issues this year appeared to hang on a lucky break in a special session. Then, on May 29th, a last-minute patch-up cleared the General Fund and Education Trust Fund budgets, along with a handful of state laws and a slew of local ones. A small window of possibility appeared to open.

Two days later, the Senate passed an amended appropriation bill for the Children First Trust Fund (HB211) that contains the first earmarks in recent memory for Medicaid expansion:

- a pilot project for transitioning 250 nursing home residents into home and community care settings (the Arise agenda item known as "Money Follows the Person");
- 250 additional Elderly & Disabled Waiver slots for helping Medicaid recipients stay out of nursing homes;
- coverage of basic-level prosthetic, orthotic and pedorthic devices; and
- one additional brand-name prescription drug per month.

HB211 goes to a conference committee on June 7, the final legislative day, to reconcile differences between the House and Senate versions.

Other Arise issues didn't get as far, though campaign finance reform stands a slim chance of passage on the

last day. Constitutional reform at least reached the House floor, but important bills on tax reform, death penalty moratorium, predatory lending, public transportation and a state minimum wage failed to come up for floor debate in either chamber. (The Knight Tax Fairness Plan – to remove the state sales tax on groceries, raise the income tax threshold, and drop the deduction for federal income tax paid – expanded to reflect revenue projections and passed the House committee with only one dissenting vote.) Now that we've seen the senators set aside their differences for a final push, we can call on them to find a similar political will next session and give these issues the full airing they deserve.

Budget bright spots

The most vulnerable Alabamians and their allies can find some reasons to applaud next year's General Fund budget. Lawmakers added \$1 million in new funding to increase payments for traditional (but not therapeutic) foster parents. The Department of Public Health received its full request for ALLKids – a \$7.5 million increase for the state children's health insurance program. An additional \$2.2 million in un-earmarked new funding, although not as much as the department requested, will serve to enhance various Public Health initiatives, such as vaccinations for uninsured children, the breast and cervical cancer screening program, and Fetal Infant Mortality Review teams.

A few words from Kimble –

Once again, Arise's legislative agenda offered Alabama a vision of its future. We must not be discouraged by the delays of a dysfunctional Senate. We believe this is the shape of things to come:

Before long, Alabama's income tax threshold will rise above the poverty line. Few of the income tax states are still taxing low-income people deeper into poverty.

Before long, Alabama will give a break on the grocery tax. We can't hold out with Mississippi as the only two states that fully tax groceries.

Before long, money will "follow the person" in Alabama. People who want to leave a nursing home and move in with family will be able to receive Medicaid support – and Medicaid will save money as a result.

We made significant progress on each of these measures. A Money Follows the Person pilot project may win approval next week, along with more money to help Medicaid recipients stay out of nursing homes. We count 55 representatives in support of the Knight Tax Fairness Plan, but we need 63 to bring it up for floor debate. At this writing we are unsure of the fate of the bill to ban PAC-to-PAC transfers. That's another glimpse of our future.

If the Knight Bill had passed, it would have gone into effect in January 2009. If it passes next spring and goes on one of the 2008 ballots, it can still go into effect in 2009. Now we plan to compile a list of undecided representatives so we can go to work on the last 8 votes we need in the House – and the 21 we need in the Senate!

Yours in hope,

Thanks for your support!

With summer here, many of us are looking forward to a more relaxed time, family vacations, trips to the beach, etc. But we'll also be busy – assessing the past year and preparing for next year's legislative session. We'll be working on 2006-07 annual reports to our members and grant reports to our foundation funders. Our policy analysts will be completing the Alabama report for the Working Poor Families Project, a national initiative to provide data analysis on low-income working families and state policies that support or hinder their economic well-being. Our organizers will be holding listening sessions throughout the state. And soon we'll be sounding the call for our member groups to submit issue proposals for the Arise 2008 legislative agenda. Yes, it's summertime – and member contributions tend to drop off during these hot and hazy months. But the work must go on if we are to keep moving toward a fairer Alabama. Please consider making a contribution today.

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