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### 2014 calendar notes

**Tues., Jan. 14** – 2014 regular legislative session begins.

**Thurs., Feb. 13** – Lobby Day at the State House.

**Mon., April 28** – Last possible meeting day of 2014 regular session. (Legislature could adjourn earlier.)

**Sat., Sept. 27** – ACPP annual meeting, Montgomery.



### A few words from Kimble

**Has Obamacare implementation turned a corner?**

Healthcare.gov is enrolling applicants at a faster pace. Arise staff can barely keep up with their invitations to train community leaders on outreach and enrollment. We're impressed with the student-led "Bama Covered" campaign (bamacovered.org), through which hundreds of university students will spend January enrolling Alabamians. And be sure to check out the new site, alabamasbest.org, that provides resources on Medicaid expansion.

**Setting the record straight: ACPP has received a \$50,000 grant to work for lower utility rates for Alabama consumers.**

We applied for an Energy Foundation grant to consider putting utility issues back on our agenda – and our members did vote to do

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# Report

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## Congressional inaction lets UI benefits expire **Budget deal eases automatic cuts**

By Carol Gundlach, policy analyst

**Today the U.S. Senate is expected to follow the House's lead in passing a two-year federal budget** that provides modest relief from automatic cuts imposed in 2011. The compromise measure, negotiated earlier this month by budget chairs Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), would clear the way for appropriation bills to be passed in early 2014 restoring funding for critical safety-net programs.

**The plan would restore \$63 billion over the next two years to military and domestic programs** hit with across-the-board cuts in the 2011 "sequestration." These cuts, if allowed to proceed on top of similar reductions in 2013, could push the still-fragile U.S. economy back into recession and cause yet more upheaval in programs and services on which the poor and other vulnerable people depend. The budget would allow Congress to restore some of the cuts in vital programs like Head Start, housing subsidies, and low-income energy assistance.

**The budget would roll back the automatic cuts without having to reduce funding for critical mandatory programs like Medicaid and disability benefits**, which have been under attack by Congressional conservatives. Instead, the increases in discretionary spending would be offset by an extension of long-term caps on Medicare provider payments, a modest increase in fees included

in airline tickets, an increase in new federal employees' contributions to their pensions, a reduction in cost-of-living adjustments for younger military retirees, and a cap on executive pay in federal contracts. Unfortunately, the budget deal would not eliminate the sequestration cuts but instead ease them for two years.

### **A blow to long-term jobless**

**Not included in the budget deal is a continuation of unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed.** If these benefits are not extended, more than 12,000 people in Alabama will lose unemployment benefits just a few days after Christmas and some 36,000 more will exhaust their benefits by the end of 2014. Nationally 1.3 million people will lose benefits immediately, and an additional 3.5 million will lose benefits over the next year. This loss will occur despite the fact that long-term unemployment remains a problem in all states, even as unemployment itself continues to decline. Thirty-seven percent of unemployed workers have been unemployed for six months or longer, and it is these workers who will be at risk of losing benefits if emergency unemployment benefits are not extended. Despite relatively low assistance levels (an average \$206 per week in Alabama) unemployment compensation is an important safety net for families (including nearly 17 million children) in which at least one parent has lost

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# Thank you for your support!

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## Budget deal

*[Continued from Page 1]*

a job. And unemployment benefits, which require on-going job search activities, are critical to keeping discouraged workers connected to the job market and actively seeking jobs.

## Farm Bill delayed

Earlier this fall, a conference committee took up re-authorization of the Farm Bill, including the SNAP (Food Stamp) program. The House-passed bill included a devastating \$40 billion reduction in SNAP benefits over the next ten years. Nearly 4 million Americans would lose food assistance (and hundreds of thousands of low-income children would lose free school meals) under the House cuts. The Senate approved a roughly \$4 billion SNAP reduction over the same period.

Thanks to the work of hunger and farm advocates, the final Farm Bill appears to be closer to the Senate version. Advocates hoped the bill would be ready in December, but these hopes have dimmed. The conference committee now anticipates that its report will be ready for a vote in early January. Should the Farm Bill be further delayed, the most immediate impact will be a dramatic increase in dairy prices as the price supports included in the bill expire.

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## Kimble's column

*[Continued from Page 1]*

so. Recently, coal interests accused us of having secret motives and tried to lump us in with environmental groups working to retire outdated coal-fired power plants. But let's be clear: Our grant was not about coal. We are at the PSC to speak up for low-income consumers. Our goals remain lower rates and greater transparency. The PSC has numerous critics, but we're not all the same.

Yours in hope,

