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Save the dates!

Arise benefit concerts

Folk singer Tom Neilson – 3 shows!

- Jan. 29:** The Sanctuary (Jubilee Community Center), Montgomery
- Jan. 30:** Auburn Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Auburn
- Jan. 31:** Rogue Tavern, Birmingham

Visit arisecitizens.org for more details and ticket info in the coming weeks.

Upcoming events

- Jan. 7, Birmingham** – Arise citywide issue preview, Greater Birmingham Ministries, noon to 1:30 p.m.
- Jan. 15, Huntsville** – NASW Alabama issue preview, Charles Stone Agricultural Center, 819 Cook Ave., 8 a.m. to noon. (Open to Arise and NASW members. Cost: \$15. 4 hours of social work CEUs.)
- Jan. 16 & Feb. 25, Huntsville** – Arise citywide issue previews, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.
Jan. 16: 10 to 11:30 a.m.
Feb. 25: 7 to 8:30 p.m.
- Jan. 19, Birmingham** – NASW Alabama issue preview, Jefferson County Community Law Office, 950 22nd St. N., Ste. 1000, 8 a.m. to noon. (Open to Arise and NASW members. Cost: \$15. 4 hours of social work CEUs.)
- Jan. 19, Homewood** – Arise citywide issue preview, Homewood Public Library, 7 to 8:30 p.m.
- Jan. 26, Birmingham** – Alliance for Responsible Lending in Alabama legislative forum, YWCA Central Alabama, time TBA.
- March 8, Montgomery** – Arise Legislative Day, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Report

Vol. 18, No. 9

December 16, 2015

Together, we're making Alabama better! Why your Arise support matters

By Brenda Boman, development director

I recently watched a video about a study on altruism. In the study, young children were put in a situation where they could be helpful to someone in need. Almost immediately, and without being solicited, the children responded in an appropriate way – even when the result was of no consequence to themselves.

That spirit of altruism generally carries into adulthood as well. Especially in this season of giving, when the need is great, many people donate very generously with food and toys and clothing to make sure the basic needs of others are met.

We all should be grateful for this basic human quality of altruism. I am especially grateful for our Arise donors, who understand that while charity is vital, we need to work harder to address the

A big step toward closing Alabama's Medicaid gap!

A state task force recommended on Nov. 18 that Alabama should close its Medicaid coverage gap. That would mean health coverage for nearly 300,000 uninsured adults – and a stronger health system and economy for all of us! See Page 2 for more details.

systemic causes of poverty. It can be overwhelming to think about the amount of suffering in our world, but I try to remember we really can help improve the circumstances of friends and neighbors in Alabama and across our nation.

Many of the economic problems faced by low-income Alabamians result from bad policy decisions in Montgomery.

What will it take to remedy a regressive state tax structure in which the top 1 percent pay only 4 percent of their income in state and local taxes while low- and middle-income families pay 10 percent? Nothing more than the will of the people, demanding legislative action to create a tax system that is just, adequate and sustainable. What will it take to eliminate high-cost lending practices, where payday and title lenders can charge up to



Development director Brenda Boman reflects on a year of change that saw Arise settling into a new office and her getting to know a new grandson. But what hasn't changed is our gratitude for your support of our shared goal of making Alabama better through better public policy. Thank you!

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A few words from Kimble

By Kimble Forrister,
executive director

What's next in the campaign to close the coverage gap? All eyes have been on Gov. Robert Bentley, who can decide at any point either to expand Medicaid as envisioned in the Affordable Care Act, or to order an "Alabama solution" to provide health coverage to workers caught in the gap between Medicaid eligibility and Marketplace subsidies. If you haven't urged Bentley to close the coverage gap, please do so today! Use the form at governor.alabama.gov/contact.

At the same time, restructuring of Medicaid also must move along. Regional care organizations will take responsibility for Medicaid on Oct. 1. But if the Legislature fails to provide adequate funding for Medicaid in the 2017 budget, the groups forming the RCOs would have good reason to decide they don't want to proceed in such an uncertain landscape. Starting now, we need to advocate for the funding needed to protect and improve Medicaid in 2017.

If Medicaid is expanded, Alabama must provide 5 percent in state matching funds starting in January 2017. Fortunately, this requirement only affects part of the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1. So we would only need about \$70 million in the budget they prepare this spring – and that's only if Bentley acts soon. If he does, we must stand ready to make the case that our investment in a healthy workforce will yield a worthwhile return.

Together, we're speaking up for "the folks who keep things going," as the task force says. That in turn will strengthen the health care system on which we all depend in Alabama. Let's keep up the good work in 2016!

Yours in peace and hope,

Unanimous recommendation goes to Bentley State urged to close Medicaid gap

By Chris Sanders, communications director

"Close the coverage gap." That was the message that the Alabama Health Care Improvement Task Force on Nov. 18 sent to Gov. Robert Bentley as its top priority for 2016. Bentley appointed the advisory body by executive order in April to make recommendations "to improve the health of Alabamians, including ways to have more accessible and more affordable health care in the state."

ACPP policy director Jim Carnes is one of some 40 task force members representing a broad range of health care stakeholder perspectives, from consumer advocacy to professional education, and from care delivery to insurance coverage and public health. Members also include several Democratic and Republican lawmakers.

Alabama is one of 20 states that have not accepted federal funding to provide health coverage for adults with incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). That's about \$16,000 a year for an individual and about \$33,000 for a family of four.

While Alabama has led the nation in insuring children, our Medicaid income limit for parents – 18 percent FPL, or \$4,365 for a family of four – is the most restrictive in the nation. Childless adults who do not have a disability are not eligible at all under Alabama's current system.

Nearly 200,000 adults in Alabama are caught in the "coverage gap," earning too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to be eligible for tax credits to help them buy coverage on the Marketplace created under the Affordable Care Act. Most of those Alabamians work in low-paying jobs we all depend on, like child care, food service and construction, but do not earn enough to buy insurance. Closing this gap would save money and keep people healthier by allowing them to

access preventive care and to treat health issues early before they develop into emergencies. Expanding Medicaid also could provide coverage for another 100,000 Alabamians now struggling to pay for insurance.

The task force voted to announce the coverage gap recommendation in advance of its final report, expected in January, because all three of its work groups identified Alabama's refusal to expand Medicaid as the state's most urgent health challenge.

The task force vote gained wide media coverage after Bentley indicated his growing interest in improving access to health coverage. Bentley initially rejected expanding Medicaid "under the current structure," but the Medicaid reforms he initiated in 2013 are nearing completion. The new Medicaid regional care organizations (RCOs), which will coordinate services through primary care "health homes," are preparing to launch in October 2016.

The task force paper (see enclosed) addresses the impact of closing the coverage gap on the state's budget, the economy, key health measures and the health care system on which we all depend. Because the phrase "Medicaid expansion" has become a political lightning rod since a 2012 U.S. Supreme Court ruling made the change optional for states, and because some states are pursuing alternative ways to provide coverage, the paper targets the "coverage gap" instead, Carnes said.

"We decided to focus on the problem, not the program," Carnes said. Carnes, who co-authored the task force recommendation, said he hopes the broader language can keep the effort aimed where it needs to be.

Much work still remains to close the state's coverage gap. The task force plans to issue further recommendations in a final report to Bentley before the 2016 regular session begins in February.

Thank you for your support!

Arise Citizens' Policy Project thanks the following donors for their contributions received between Sept. 1 and Nov. 30, 2015:

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456 percent and 300 percent annual interest, respectively? Again, the will of the people, calling for reasonable rates.

But like the toddlers in the study, people first have to see the need. Your donations to ACPP are used to educate the public and lawmakers about unfair policies, and about legislative actions that could make life better for thousands of Alabama families who struggle to make ends meet.

Please give generously to your favorite charities (including Arise!) this holiday season. And please help us spread the word about the work needed to make the holidays brighter for Alabama families for years to come!