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**Annual Meeting**  
**Sept. 19, 9:30-3:00**  
**Montgomery**

**Location:** Dexter Avenue United Methodist Church, 301 Dexter Ave. (across from Supreme Court).

*Available at Annual Meeting:* Last year's Arise 20th anniversary T-shirts – while supplies last!

**Sun., Sept. 6, 3-7 p.m.**  
**Rally for Health Equity**

A rally, free concert and community health fair on the steps of the Alabama State Capitol on Sept. 6 will highlight access to health care as a civil right. The event, sponsored by the Student National Medical Association, the Community Care Network and other partners, will culminate a weekend journey from Selma to Montgomery by medical students and other supporters of health care reform.

To learn more about the weekend activities, including a Saturday health fair in Camden, visit [www.snma.org](http://www.snma.org).

**[www.arisecitizens.org](http://www.arisecitizens.org)**  
**ACPP website gets new look, more info**

Want to share an Arise fact sheet with a friend? Need to find a resource mentioned in a past newsletter? Curious about what advocates in other states are doing on similar issues? Find it fast at the re-designed ACPP website. *Special thanks to Charles Kamerling of DCVI Studios ([dcvistudios.com](http://dcvistudios.com)) for the in-kind donation of Web design and hosting!*

# Report

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Vol. 12, No. 6

August 27, 2009

## **Members to consider seven issues**

# Setting our priorities for 2010

Arise's policy agenda for the coming year will be the focus of the annual meeting Sept. 19 (*see calendar*). Members will choose up to five issues from a slate of seven, in addition to the two permanent priorities of tax reform and health care funding. The articles below propose two new issues for members' consideration, and the issues up for renewal appear on Page 3. Other business slated for consideration at the meeting includes election of board members (*see nominations on Page 3*) and approval of a new membership outreach strategy.

### **Affordable Housing Trust Fund**

*By Marcie Porter, President, Low Income Housing Coalition of Alabama*

The establishment of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund (HTF) in Alabama will alleviate housing costs for low-income Alabamians and those with special needs (individuals/families living with mental illness, those who are experiencing or are on the verge of experiencing homelessness, the disabled and the elderly). By statute, 100 percent of the funds available must go to individuals/families living at or below 60 percent of area median income (AMI), with the majority targeted to 30 percent or below of AMI. The HTF will be administered by the Alabama Housing Finance Authority and will have an oversight committee of 11 appointed members. The dedicated

revenue stream will be a mortgage recording tax of 5 cents for each \$100. This is an increase of the current tax rate by 33.3 percent (from 15 cents to 20 cents). Before the downturn in the real estate market, this fee was projected to generate \$23.7 million annually for the trust fund.

To allow for the largest impact in the state, the HTF can be used for a wide range of housing related activities: rental and homeownership options, predevelopment, acquisition, some supportive services, down payment assistance, permanent supportive housing, and loans or grants. Nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations that partner with nonprofits, municipalities and public housing authorities are all eligible to access these funds.

Though the current housing market has made the process of finding safe, decent and affordable housing a challenge for most Alabamians, people of low wealth have faced this desperate situation for years – and it has been exacerbated by the economic downturn. Data suggest that Alabama lacks more than 44,000 available and affordable housing units for low-income residents. Research continues to show that stable housing leads to improved health outcomes for special needs individuals, including fewer hospitalizations and emergency room visits, which in turn decreases the burden on

**Action:** Help us choose our 2010 issue priorities. If you made a financial gift and contacted an elected official on an Arise issue this year, you're eligible to vote at the annual meeting!

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## A few words from Kimble —

**“I learned a lot more from your presentation than I learned at the congressman’s town hall.”** In an atmosphere of wild misinformation, Arise is a trusted voice for thousands of people. We’re careful to check our facts. We’re scheduling health care reform briefings all over the state – but especially in the districts of Reps. Bobby Bright and Parker Griffith, Alabama’s Blue Dog Democrats.

**Wherever you live, your voice is important.** The polling numbers on reform are still competitive – but I bet that balance isn’t reflected in the phone calls your representative gets. Would the tone of the debate shift if they heard from a broader sample of constituents?

**On Sept. 1, Birmingham ministers will hold a news conference** to issue this Alabama Arise Faith Statement on Health Care Reform:

**“When people of faith see a stranger needing health care,** they cannot walk by on the other side. They recognize that health care is a shared responsibility among individuals, families and the larger community.

**“In the United States today,** we possess the medical knowledge, the wealth and the human resources to fulfill this responsibility as never before. Yet, millions of our neighbors lack medical care because they can’t afford it, or because there aren’t enough care providers where they live. Every month, thousands of Alabamians lose the insurance coverage and medical care they’ve always counted on.

**“Our health care system cries out for reform.** The issue has now come to the forefront of political and media attention. But it has yet to receive the honest, substantive, faith-informed debate it deserves.

**“As ministers of the Birmingham community,** we call on our own congregations to lift a prophetic voice to their members of Congress. Our nation’s values should reflect the values of its people: compassion for our neighbor, facing up to our responsibilities and paying the bills.

**“We support a system in which everyone bears a share of financial responsibility:** families, employers and government.

**“We support a vision of quality health care that’s affordable to all.”**

Yours in peace and hope,

## Housing Trust Fund

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private and governmental support systems.

While all of Arise’s legislative priorities address long-term systemic issues facing people living in poverty, the piece that connects all of the priorities is affordable housing. Housing issues are affecting a large percentage of Alabamians right now, making this issue urgent as well as important. It will require everyone working together to overcome these challenges. The establishment of a HTF should appeal to all those interested in alleviating poverty in Alabama.

The Low Income Housing Coalition of Alabama (LIHCA) has worked with the potential opponents to this legislation as part of the Housing Trust Fund task force. We were able to gain support of bankers and developers throughout the state. The Realtors and builders are hesitant to give their support for the legislation given the funding source. Getting the bill passed in the next session will likely be difficult because it will require a new funding source, but the mortgage recording tax was chosen because of its direct link to housing and the fact that it has not been increased in many years. Once the revenue stream is agreed upon, we believe support for this issue will be widespread with very little opposition.

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## Equal Pay Commission

*By Jo Ann Cummings, State President,  
American Association of University Women of  
Alabama*

In Alabama, there are disparities in pay between men and women and between minorities and non-minorities that cannot be explained away by differences in education, experience or responsibilities. We need to establish an Equal Pay Commission to study these disparities and recommend solutions. Rep. Laura Hall, D-Huntsville, has repeatedly introduced legislation to do so.

Based on year-round, full-time median salaries for 2007, Alabama women earned

\$29,300 vs. \$40,500 for Alabama men. This is a wage gap of 28 percent (vs. a national gap of 22 percent). African American females earn 55 percent, and Hispanic women earn 57 percent, compared to white men in Alabama.

Most women in Alabama work because they have to, to support themselves and their families. Female-headed households suffer disproportionately from low wages. More than one-third of Alabama’s single female heads of households with children are living at or below the federal poverty level. When hard-working women are not paid for the full value of their work, the whole family, community and state suffer.

The wage gap persists for many reasons. Women’s traditional work patterns (breaks in working for family care) are one reason all women are paid less, even though not all women follow these patterns or can afford the time off. Women don’t have equal job opportunities, and often don’t have an equal chance at training, apprenticeship and promotions, for fear they might leave work.

The wage gap also exists because of the types of positions women hold. Women are more likely to be employed in female-dominated occupations such as nurses, tellers, secretaries and teachers. These occupations pay less than male-dominated positions, even though many of the jobs may require comparable work, training, effort, qualifications and responsibilities. Some occupations pay less *because* they are occupations that are held by women. Some men who work in these fields suffer from pay inequity, too, though they typically still make more money than women.

Girls frequently are not encouraged to visualize future careers in fields dominated by men that pay more, such as business, science, engineering or the professions. A majority of young women pursue degrees and careers in education, humanities, health, social science and other fields that are dominated by women and pay less.

Pay disparities are due in part to discrimination. Many women earn less than men in exactly the same jobs. This may be

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## Equal Pay Commission

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based on assumptions that employers make or overt or inadvertent discrimination. In any case, the result is that women workers are paid less than men for comparable work.

A lifetime of unequal pay adds up. Over her lifetime, an average woman will lose anywhere from \$400,000 to \$1.2 million (depending on her education) due to unequal pay because of her gender. This includes bonuses, overtime, raises and retirement benefits.

Though equal and fair pay has been addressed by past federal legislation, there are still gaps affecting women and minorities, allowing businesses to continue pay discrimination. The career expectations for girls and young women, and the attitudes of society, must also change so that all of our citizens can reach their full earning potential. We urge Arise to adopt pay equity as a priority issue, so a commission can study the problem and present recommendations.

### Nominees for 2010 Board of Directors

*Representatives of low-income groups:* **Cynthia Brown**, Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama; **Callie Greer**, Jubilee Community Center; **Mary Jones**, Women as Strength Program; **R. G. Lyons**, Community Church Without Walls; **Lee Morgan**, Church of the Reconciler; **Paul Nelson**, South Bay Communities Alliance; **Alice Paris**, **Sarah Price**, Bethel Ensley Action Tasks; **Isabel Rubio**, Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama; **Donald Stone**, Partners in Progress.

*Representatives of other groups and at-large members:* **Tory Bray**, at large; **Nancy Brennan**, at large; **Sr. Janet Connorton**, Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester; **Tom Duley**, Urban Ministry; **Carol Gundlach**, Immanuel Presbyterian Church; **Helen Rivas**, Latinos Unidos de Alabama; **Judy Roy**, Birmingham Independent Living Center; **Ruthie Sherrill**, University Presbyterian Church; **Jackie Tipper**, The Shoals Environmental Alliance; **Carole Zugazaga**, at large.

## Recap of current policy priorities

### Permanent issues:

#### Tax reform

Alabama's tax system is regressive, requiring low-income people to pay a larger share of their income in state and local taxes than higher-income people do. Alabama also is one of only two states with no tax break on groceries. The Tax Fairness Amendment would

- remove the state's 4 percent sales tax on groceries,
- cap the deduction for federal income tax, which favors the highest earners, and
- cut taxes for more than 90 percent of Alabamians, according to the Legislative Fiscal Office.

#### Budget: Health care

Growing numbers of low- and middle-income Alabamians can't afford health insurance, even as Medicaid and ALL Kids make up increasingly large shares of the state's budget. Congress is considering federal reforms to expand coverage and make quality health care more accessible and affordable for American families.

### Issues proposed for renewal:

#### Moratorium on executions

In Alabama, money and race are factors in determining who ends up on death row. Arise supports a moratorium requiring Alabama to halt executions for three years while the state reviews fairness issues regarding indigent defense and other aspects of the capital punishment system.

#### Constitutional reform

Alabama's 1901 constitution gives the Legislature too much power at the expense of local governments. Until we get a new state constitution, local citizens will be denied the right to make local decisions about issues

affecting their communities. Arise supports a convention to write a new constitution.

#### Public transportation

All public transportation funds in Alabama come from federal or local governments – not a penny from the state. Alabama gas taxes can't be spent on public transportation. Arise supports the provision of state funds to meet both urban and rural public transportation needs.

#### Worker savings incentives

Incentives can help low-income people save money for education, housing or entrepreneurship. A federal-state partnership called Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) offers low-income people a 2-to-1 match on up to \$2,000 of savings for:

- college or technical training,
- a down payment on a home or
- starting a small business.

#### Katrina relief

The 2005 hurricane displaced hundreds of Alabama families. Many still need help to rebuild their homes to pre-storm levels. Effective recovery requires a full assessment of unmet needs in storm-damaged south Mobile County and equitable, timely distribution of adequate funds to help survivors rebuild their lives.

### Endorsements:

ACPP endorses three additional policy goals:

- Preventing disproportionate impacts from environmental hazards on low-income and minority communities.
- Ensuring transparency in political campaigning and state budgeting.
- Regulating tax preparation services.

### **Beyond health care reform Budgets, climate change among other looming issues**

By Chris Sanders, policy analyst

**Health care reform has been front and center in American politics for the last few months.** But it isn't the only noteworthy thing happening in Washington, D.C., this year. Several other issues affecting low-income people soon may vie for headlines as well. The following are a few things to watch on Capitol Hill as 2009 comes to a close.

#### **The FY 2010 federal budget**

**Compared to recent years, Congress is ahead of schedule in its work on the fiscal year 2010 budget.** The House has passed all 12 appropriations bills for the budget year that starts in October. The Senate has approved four, and seven more have cleared Senate committees. The budget bills would provide more money for adult education; the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program (WIC); and community development block grants (CDBGs); and a large funding increase for intercity and high-speed rail grants. The bills also offer level funding to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and most discretionary health programs. (Medicare and Medicaid are funded separately as entitlements.)

#### **Climate change legislation**

**The House voted 219-212 in June to approve the American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES),** despite opposition from all seven Alabama congressmen. The legislation, also known as "cap and trade" or the Waxman-Markey bill after its sponsors, aims to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050. ACES would set an overall limit on emissions and set up a market in which companies could buy or sell pollution permits. Under the House bill, low-income consumers would receive revenues from auctions of 15 percent of the permits to help them afford higher energy prices resulting from the plan. Media reports say the Senate may take up ACES after it finishes work on health care reform.

#### **A second stimulus package?**

**The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA),** which was enacted in

February, will pump \$787 billion into the economy through 2011, but some economists say the spending was not enough to lift the nation out of a deep recession. ARRA money has helped most states, including Alabama, prevent layoffs of thousands of public employees and fill massive budget holes created by falling tax revenues. But with many states expecting continued shortfalls when ARRA funds disappear in 2011, some state leaders may ask the federal government to help them avoid deep cuts to social safety nets and other public services. The White House and congressional leaders thus far have given few indications that they plan to pursue a second stimulus package.

#### **Pay-as-you-go (PAYGO)**

**The House voted 265-166 in July to approve the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act,** which would require certain new mandatory spending increases or tax cuts to be offset by corresponding spending cuts or tax increases. The legislation, which seeks to control deficit spending, would codify a principle established in a 2007 congressional rule and would not apply to discretionary spending or Social Security. The bill's future is uncertain because of objections from U.S. Sen. Kent Conrad, chairman of the Senate Budget Committee. Conrad, D-N.D., has expressed concerns that the bill exempts many sizable provisions from pay-as-you-go requirements, including extensions of the federal estate tax cut and the middle-class portions of the 2001 and 2003 federal income tax cuts.

#### **Regulation of tax preparers**

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is working on proposals that could require licensing and training for paid tax preparers. "Tax return preparers help Americans with one of their biggest financial transactions each year," IRS Commissioner Doug Shulman said in June. "We must ensure that all preparers are ethical, provide good service and are qualified." Shulman said he will send his recommendations to President Obama and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner by December. They could take the form of a proposed law or new IRS regulations.

**To receive e-mail alerts** on these and other upcoming actions in Congress, go to [arisecitizens.org](http://arisecitizens.org) and join the Google group.

## Thank you!

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