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post-consumer content.*

**Annual meeting
Sat., Sept. 17
9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Montgomery**

**St. John's A.M.E. Church
807 Madison Ave.
Montgomery, AL 36104**

SPECIAL GUEST:

Katherine Newman, author of
Taxing the Poor (see Page 6).

DIRECTIONS

From north Alabama via I-65:

1. Take the Clay St. exit (172).
2. Turn LEFT onto Herron St.
3. Herron St. becomes Bibb St.
4. Bibb becomes Madison Ave.
5. St. John's at 807 Madison is on the LEFT.

From south Alabama via I-65:

1. Take the Herron St. exit (172).
2. Herron becomes Bibb St.
3. Bibb becomes Madison Ave.
4. St. John's at 807 Madison is on the LEFT.

From east Alabama via I-85:

1. Take the Union St. exit (1).
2. Take Union to Madison Ave.
3. Turn RIGHT on Madison.
4. St. John's at 807 Madison is on the LEFT.

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Report

This newsletter made possible by the members of Arise Citizens' Policy Project
Vol. 14, No. 5

August 17, 2011

Annual Meeting Sept. 17th

What will our goals be for 2012?

Four new issues will vie with last year's priorities for the five annual slots on ACP's 2012 agenda. Member group representatives and individual voting members will select the new issue lineup at the annual meeting on Saturday, Sept. 17, in Montgomery (see details at left). The new proposals are fair pricing of prison phone calls, a Housing Trust Fund, supportive housing for the homeless, and repeal of the 2011 immigration law. Two issues (state tax reform and adequate state budgets for human services) are permanent priorities. The new proposals appear below in the authors' own words, followed by the standing issues.

Fair pricing of prison phone calls

By Rosemary Collins, Alabama CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)

Our proposal seeks to remove kickbacks on prison phone service and set a reasonable rate on prisoners' phone calls to their families. It costs \$8.25 to talk for 20 minutes to someone in an Alabama prison. There is more cost to them when they have to send money in advance to receive collect calls from the prisoners. It costs more over the state line. Alabama receives \$5.5 million in kickbacks from the telephone provider who is awarded the contract for the telephone services in the prisons. Some states, such as New York, have stopped getting kickbacks. The people who go to prison come from poor families.

Housing Trust Fund

By Ashley Kerr, Low Income Housing Coalition of Alabama (LIHCA)

Everyone deserves the opportunity to succeed in life, and this begins with a place to call home. Unfortunately for many Alabamians, a safe, decent and affordable

home is only a dream. The housing need in Alabama is overwhelming: more than 90,000 affordable homes needed to house individuals with extremely low incomes.

The Low Income Housing Coalition of Alabama (LIHCA) understands the importance of affordable housing and advocates for the passage of the Housing Trust Fund bill. This legislation will establish a fund dedicated to increasing housing options for Alabamians living with low incomes (60 percent of the area median income or below). This includes many of our fellow Alabamians, including the elderly, individuals living with disabilities, veterans and children. Stable housing provides individuals and families the sanctuary they need to live more fruitful lives, offering them a place to receive health services, find employment and step out of poverty.

The Housing Trust Fund bill will establish a fund for the creation, maintenance and retention of homes for low-income individuals and families. This includes both rental and homeownership options. With the creation of new affordable homes in Alabama, families can focus on economic stability, reduce community blight and promote growth in the economy by creating new jobs and increasing tax revenue. These benefits will not only improve the lives of those in need of housing but will serve as a positive step toward increasing the overall economic status of the state.

The bill was first introduced in 2009 and has been making progress in the Legislature ever since. The sponsor, Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, elected to remove the revenue source from the bill, and the

[Turn to Page 2]

A few words from Kimble —

Wanted: Advocates for Arise's common good. As you read the proposals in this newsletter, we hope you will keep in mind the challenges we face in the State House. What should be Arise's role in the new environment? We're still finding our way through a maze of new dynamics, including a new centralized leadership style, new rules and new priorities. And as many of you have discovered, new legislators require a lot of relationship-building and updates on issues they haven't followed before.

Next month, our members will choose seven priority issues for 2012. If you had a chance to deploy seven staff members on Alabama poverty issues, would you assign all of them to one issue? Maybe four to one issue and one each to three others? Whatever your personal top issue is, we hope you will put on your "Arise hat" and think about the good of the whole. In other words, we love our one-issue advocates, but what we need most is a core group of members who will struggle to come up with a balanced array of issues that will best address the needs of low-income Alabamians in 2012.

Groups are eligible to vote if they are Arise members in good standing as of Sept. 2. Individual members can vote if they met the eligibility requirements – made a financial donation *and* took an advocacy action – between July 1, 2010, and June 30, 2011. We hope all eligible voters will attend! If you have questions about your status, call Brenda at (800) 832-9060.

Are you starting your day with Arise's Daily News Digest? Thanks to hyper-caffeinated early riser Ron Gilbert, a whopping 600 readers get an early email that summarizes the day's news articles on topics we care about. Sign up at arisecitizens.org and start a wholesome habit!

With peace,



Housing Trust Fund

[Continued from Page 1]

current version of the bill is enabling legislation only. It is LIHCA's belief that a revenue neutral bill is more palatable to legislators in our current economic situation. In the 2011 legislative session, the bill (HB 349) passed unanimously in the House and moved to the Senate, where it was tabled by the Banking and Insurance Committee. LIHCA plans to meet with senators before the next session to advocate for the passage of this bill and is hopeful that the bill will pass in 2012.

The Housing Trust Fund bill supports Arise Citizens' Policy Project's values by creating a mechanism that will help low-income individuals and families stabilize their housing and, in turn, focus on the economic stability of their households. There is no statewide affordable housing policy in Alabama, and no state funds are invested in affordable housing. The bill is a structural change to statewide policy and provides the opportunity to invest in the people and our communities in Alabama. This bill is an opportunity to create housing for those in need, and in turn create jobs, increase tax revenue and strengthen our communities. A Housing Trust Fund also will equip Alabama to better meet the needs of its low-income citizens in the future, and especially during times of disaster. Everyone deserves the opportunity to succeed in life; in Alabama, this begins with a place to call home.

Repeal 2011 immigration law

By Bob Dyck, Unitarian Universalist Church of Birmingham

The Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act of 2011 is unconstitutional, because it usurps federal powers on immigration. It is unjust and immoral, because it discriminates against Hispanics and other minority groups whose color, language and culture are different from the prevailing white majority. The law is contrary to the multicultural ideals and composition of Alabama and the United States, which have been fundamental to making our nation economically and socially productive, as well as a leading example of the benefits of cross-cultural collaboration throughout the world. The

act is inimical to the economic growth and prosperity of Alabama, as demonstrated by the analysis of leading economists from Alabama's universities. It is egregiously punitive and mean-spirited, deterring children from going to school, denying people public benefits to which they are lawfully entitled, and interfering with their ability to rent housing, earn a living and enter into contracts.

The law requires state and local police officers to detain and investigate people based on a "suspicion" that they may be undocumented immigrants, thus inviting racial profiling and raising concerns about prolonged and erroneous detentions, as well as generating high law enforcement costs that local jurisdictions can ill afford.

Section 10 of the law criminalizes "willful failure to complete or carry an alien registration document." Supreme Court precedent clearly establishes that states may not enact alien registration laws. Moreover, enforcement of Section 10 would interfere with the administration of federal immigration law and will result in wrongful arrests and detention.

Section 13 criminalizes "harboring" and "transporting" any undocumented immigrant, a provision of particular concern to public, nonprofit and faith-based care-giving communities.

Section 14 sets out steep criminal penalties for "dealing in false identification documents" and "vital records fraud." Given the existing crime of possessing forged documents under Alabama law, it is clear that the inclusion of this provision in HB 56 is meant to target immigrants and to override the federal aggravated identity theft statute, which requires that the identity information used belongs to an actual person.

The law creates a broad range of new immigration-related crimes, with draconian penalties attached. Section 22 even authorizes the Alabama Department of Homeland Security to hire and maintain its own immigration police force, supplanting the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This is constitutionally impermissible: State law enforcement officers have no general authority to

[Turn to Page 3]

Help wanted!

A new grant opportunity and a staffer's departure for Tuscaloosa have created job openings at ACPP at a time when few nonprofits are hiring. We soon will post announcements through the Nonprofit Resource Center of Alabama and other networks, but we wanted to give our members a heads-up first. Word of mouth is often the best source for referrals. Please review these brief descriptions and consider whether you might know someone – or be someone! – who would fit the bill.

ACPP is a finalist for a major grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for a one-year project promoting Alabama's implementation of the Affordable Care Act, the 2010 health care reform law. The funding, which begins Oct. 1, would allow us to add two new staffers for one year.

We're seeking a **health reform organizer** to lead our outreach and education efforts on the nuts and bolts of health care reform: Medicaid expansion, a consumer-friendly Health Insurance Exchange and improved coverage for special-needs populations. Candidates should have community organizing or human services experience, interactive presentation skills adaptable to varied audiences, and a commitment to helping people become engaged citizens. Familiarity with state health services is a plus.

We also need a **health policy analyst** to develop educational materials that make the complicated provisions of the new law accessible to a general audience. This position requires strong writing skills and experience in analyzing public policy. Again, familiarity with state health services would be a major asset.

Last, but not least, we're looking for a **part-time bookkeeper**, as we bid farewell to our faithful friend Wendy Tucker. This position requires one day of work per week, with experience in nonprofit accounting, grant funding and related activities.

Detailed descriptions will be available soon at our website and elsewhere. In the meantime, please send any questions or referrals to kimble@alarise.org.

Immigration law

[Continued from Page 2]

enforce federal civil immigration law. Federal law specifically authorizes state officers to assist the federal government in immigration enforcement only in narrowly defined circumstances and with the federal government's permission and oversight. This provision attempts to circumvent the federal government's primacy in the field of immigration.

Repeal of HB 56 would eliminate unjust discrimination against low-income immigrants, including economic discrimination, which will exacerbate the poverty of this population.

Supportive housing

By Byl Boyd, Birmingham Coalition for the Homeless

No one should experience homelessness. No one should be without a safe, stable place to call home. A report released June 16, 2011, by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development shows that between 2008 and 2009, homelessness increased 11.5 percent in Alabama and 8 percent in the Birmingham area. The HUD report showed that in 2009, for the second year in a row, the number of homeless families nationally has increased, something the department said is almost certainly due to the ongoing effects of the recession.

The taxpayers of Alabama spend an exorbitant amount on the chronically homeless through hospital stays, incarcerations, etc. These funds could be better utilized by providing permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless. An example cited in Birmingham's "10-Year Plan" tells of one chronically homeless man accruing \$334,275 in hospital charges, which were ultimately paid by taxpayers.

A chronically homeless person is an individual who (1) has been continuously homeless for one year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years,

and (2) has a disabling condition (i.e., a serious mental illness, a diagnosable substance use disorder, a developmental disability or a chronic physical illness or disability). The solution: supportive housing.

Supportive housing is a successful, cost-effective combination of affordable housing with services that help people live more stable, productive lives. Supportive housing works well for people who face the most complex challenges: individuals and families who are not only homeless but who also have very low incomes and serious, persistent issues that may include substance use, mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

Building on the watershed year in efforts to prevent and end homelessness in other states, President Obama has released his fiscal year 2012 budget proposal that includes a significant funding commitment for his "Opening Doors" program. Funding for the states is available, but our 1901 constitution negates our chances for an award because of the matching funds requirement. This must be addressed, as that caveat is one of the primary sources of many of our areas of need in our low-income and homeless populations.

We've begun an active dialogue with Gov. Robert Bentley's Interagency on Homelessness, and we're looking at ways to fund continuums of care throughout the state with regard to permanent supportive housing. We're reviewing what other states have done, such as Virginia's CASH (Creating Assets, Savings and Hope) program. Permanent supportive housing has proved to be most cost-effective to taxpayers.

To these ends, we will lobby members of the Legislature to draft and submit enabling legislation with the intent of locating a stable funding stream to meet federal requirements for matching funds.

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Current Arise priorities

Permanent issues:

Tax reform

Call it Alabama's tax paradox: Even though the state has some of the nation's lowest taxes, low-income Alabamians shoulder a larger share of those taxes than their counterparts elsewhere. The state's upside-down tax system requires low- and middle-income households to pay twice the share of their income in state and local taxes that higher-income people do. A major cause of that disparity is that Alabama is one of only two states with no tax break on groceries.

ACPP has pushed for years to bring Alabama's regressive tax system closer to balance by removing the state sales tax on groceries and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. Legislation proposed last session would have raised \$565 million by ending the state's full income tax deduction for federal income taxes, a tax break that only two other states offer. Of that amount, \$325 million would have paid for removal of the state portion of the sales tax on groceries and OTC drugs. The remaining \$240 million would have shored up the Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget, with roughly two-thirds going to K-12 schools and one-third going to higher education. The grocery tax bill did not escape committee last session, and passage next year seems unlikely. ACPP is considering several possible approaches for next year, including a proposal by the Committee of United Leadership (COUL) to phase in grocery tax reduction and replacement revenues over several years.

Adequate state budgets

The Great Recession continues to take a toll on Alabama's budgets, with high unemployment and lower wages meaning fewer revenues to support education, Medicaid and other public services. On the heels of three straight years of mid-year budget cuts known as proration, fiscal year (FY) 2012

appropriations in both the ETF and General Fund will remain below their FY 2008 levels. Tepid revenue growth will not come close to restoring that cumulative funding loss. The FY 2012 budgets, which take effect Oct. 1, also will not replace more than \$3 billion of temporary federal aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that has helped stave off even deeper service cuts in the last two years but will not be available next year.

The cuts have begun to pile up. More than 1,100 vacant teacher positions will go unfilled this fall, and the state for the third straight year will not provide enough money to replace most textbooks. Thousands of Alabamians may lose community mental health and substance abuse treatment. Hundreds of court layoffs could slow the administration of justice to a crawl. Alabama's Medicaid program, already one of the nation's most barebones, will limit enrollees to no more than four brand-name prescription drugs per month. Many college students will face another round of double-digit tuition increases. With the economic situation unlikely to brighten in the near term, Alabamians will have to choose next year whether to continue making deep cuts to public services or take a more balanced approach, combining spending cuts with significant new revenues.

Issues proposed for renewal:

Equal Pay Commission

Sizable earnings gaps remain between women and men and between minorities and non-minorities in Alabama despite decades of steady improvement. Some of the disparities persist even among workers with comparable employment, educational background and job tenure. This lack of pay equity can cost workers hundreds of thousands of dollars over their lifetimes. It also hits especially hard among low-income Alabamians, for whom a few dollars a week can make or break a household budget.

A state Equal Pay Commission with representatives from business, labor,

education and other interested groups could study the disparities' causes in Alabama and propose solutions to help end the pay gaps. The Legislature in 2009 approved a joint resolution to create a commission that was to report its findings during the 2010 session. But most of the members were not appointed, and the panel never met. Legislation to re-establish a commission did not get committee approval in the House or Senate last session, with some opponents citing their desire for more business members on the panel. Equal Pay Commission legislation is expected to return next year, but its fate is uncertain.

Constitutional reform

Alabama's 1901 constitution gives the Legislature too much power at the expense of local governments. Until we rewrite the state constitution, local citizens will be denied the right to make direct decisions about issues affecting their communities. Arise has been collaborating with other advocacy groups to develop strategies for constitutional reform.

The Legislature passed a resolution in 2011 to create a constitutional commission that will rewrite (and then submit to the Legislature for approval) most of the articles of the constitution. These rewritten articles, if passed by the Legislature, then will be submitted to the public for a statewide vote. The revision of Article IV, concerning the "Legislative Department," may or not include a "home rule" provision for the counties, one of the changes most eagerly sought by reform advocates. The provisions governing taxation are excluded from the commission's consideration.

The bulk of statewide constitutional reform activity until 2014 is likely to center on influencing the revised articles produced by the commission and advocating on the resulting legislation. Further activity could encourage the Legislature to take on

[Turn to Page 5]

Current priorities

[Continued from Page 4]

other issues, such as taxation, not considered by the commission.

Public transportation

Alabamians without access to reliable automobile transportation are largely disconnected from society, including jobs, health care and many other services and opportunities. Whether in rural or urban areas, lack of affordable public transportation keeps family and friends apart and impairs social, cultural and economic integration and efficiency. Alabama is one of only four states in the nation that provide no state funding for public transportation, and state policy remains mired in the old “roads and bridges” approach that disregards people without automobiles.

Bills seeking to improve transit options failed to emerge from committee in 2011, but some advocates remain hopeful that alliances between counties and road builders could lead to potential revenue sources for public transportation projects. Visions of what constitutes “public transportation” vary widely, from brokered vans and shuttles taking people to appointments to improved urban bus routes to high-speed regional rail lines. Despite these challenges, public transportation continues to draw a high level of public support and activism.

Moratorium on executions

In Alabama, money and race help determine who ends up on death row. Alabama has problems at every level of its capital punishment system: the quality of lawyers appointed to represent the indigent, a policy that allows elected judges to disregard the sentencing recommendations of juries, and the failure to provide legal assistance to those seeking to appeal convictions.

For several years, Arise has supported a moratorium, by which the state

would halt executions for up to three years while reviewing the system’s fairness with regard to due process, indigent defense and the risks of wrongful convictions. In 2011, several bills constraining executions failed to receive committee consideration. Though we may expect the usual sponsors to bring their bills again next year, legislative approval of a moratorium in 2012 appears unlikely.

Update on our 2011 win

Worker savings incentives

In 2011, nearly five years of Arise advocacy paid off in the passage of the IDA bill, which allows the state to contribute to individual development accounts designed to help low-income Alabamians save money toward three basic assets: postsecondary education, business start-up or first-time home-ownership. In a fully funded IDA program, participants save up to \$2,000 and triple their savings with matches from the federal government and a third party (the state, a local government or a nonprofit). Account holders must complete financial literacy training.

The new law enables Alabama to establish the framework for an IDA program but provides no funding. At a time of unprecedented fiscal austerity, securing an appropriation will be difficult. We don’t anticipate a need for further legislation to secure IDA funding. Rather, we likely will advocate for a budget measure through the appropriations process. One potential strategy could focus on channeling existing funds for postsecondary education into IDA accounts for continued education.

An easy, affordable way to give

Click “donate now” at arisecitizens.org to sign up for recurring donations of \$5 or more. Your monthly gift will provide solid support we can count on as we plan for the coming year.

Washington update

Deep cuts ahead after debt ceiling deal

By *Chris Sanders, policy analyst*

An 11th-hour deal to avert a federal default could mean enormous cuts to education, Medicaid and other federal spending in the next decade. Low-income programs will enjoy some protections, but they will not be entirely shielded from the budget ax. The deal likely will mean less federal money for states, forcing Alabama to fill the hole by either raising revenues or making even deeper service cuts.

Most in Congress, even those who voted for it, seem to dislike the deal. Many GOP representatives said the plan did not do enough to reduce the deficit and that the potential defense cuts were too deep. Many Democratic leaders, meanwhile, objected that the lack of new revenues in the plan would force spending cuts that will stymie the nation’s economic recovery. One representative went so far as to call the deal “a sugar-coated Satan sandwich.” Nonetheless, President Obama signed the measure into law on Aug. 2 after a 269-161 House vote and a 74-26 Senate vote.

The two-step package will cut at least \$2.1 trillion in spending over the next decade and increase the nation’s debt ceiling until 2013. About \$900 billion of that amount will come from cuts to defense and domestic discretionary programs like education and environmental protection. The cuts will begin in October, but most will come in later years in an effort to reduce their immediate impact on a sluggish economy. A 12-member joint committee of House and Senate members, with membership divided evenly by party and chamber, will work to produce another \$1.2 trillion to \$1.5 trillion in deficit savings through spending cuts, new revenues or both.

Congress will vote on the joint committee’s plan by no later than Dec. 23. Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security will be exempt from the cuts that start in October, but the committee could propose cuts to those programs during the second phase. With Republican leaders vowing to oppose any revenue increases, low-income advocates warn that the committee could push for devastating Medicaid cuts. That could mean

[Turn to Page 6]

Thank you, contributors!

ACPP thanks the following donors for their gifts received between June 8 and Aug. 13, 2011:

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Bill & Anne Blackerby, Jr., Birmingham

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Annual meeting extra! Noted author to speak on taxing the poor

Professor Katherine S. Newman, a widely published expert on poverty and the working poor, will return to Alabama on Sept. 17 to speak at the Arise annual meeting. Newman, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Johns Hopkins University, previously spoke at an Arise event in 2008. Inspired by the efforts being made here to attack the root causes of poverty through tax reform, she dedicated her latest book – along with her share of the royalties – to Alabama Arise. Signed copies of *Taxing the Poor: Harming the Truly Disadvantaged* will be available for purchase for \$25 (credit cards accepted).

Washington update

[Continued from Page 5]

higher costs for states, fewer enrollees and fewer benefits for recipients.

If Congress ultimately rejects the joint committee's proposal, a decade of automatic spending cuts would begin in January 2013. The \$1.2 trillion of across-the-board cuts would be divided evenly between defense and domestic spending. Payments to hospitals and other Medicare providers would be reduced by 2 percent, but benefits for Medicare recipients would be protected. Medicaid and Social Security also would be exempt from the triggered cuts, as would food stamps, child care, the earned income tax credit (EITC) and other low-income assistance programs.

Other battles with big implications for the nation's future are coming.

Most of the federal gasoline tax, which pays for transportation infrastructure, will expire Sept. 30 unless Congress renews it. The Bush-era tax cuts are set to expire Dec. 31, 2012. And the nation again will face default unless the debt ceiling is raised in early 2013. The outcomes of these and other policy debates will play a major role in shaping the United States for decades to come.