

Tuscaloosa News

DANA BEYERLE: Poverty rates in Alabama above national average

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Alabama Arise Citizen Action Program cited two reports of the recession's impact in Alabama. ACPA executive Director Kimble Forrister said the reports should be a "wake-up call to state policy-makers."

Using 2009-10 Census Bureau figures, Forrister said 16.9 percent of Alabamians were in poverty those two years. (A different Census number for 2010 showed a slightly higher poverty rate.)

The 16.9 percent rate was above the national rate of 14.7 percent for those two years and was up significantly from the 2008-09 rate of 14.4 percent, Arise said.

A report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture said that 17.3 percent of the state's 1.8 million households between 2008 and 2010 had limited access to adequate food.

"For too many Alabama households, the family dinner table is a snapshot of the bleak economy," Forrister said. He advocated removing the state's 4 percent sales tax on food as a way to help Alabamians.

Forrister said dropping the tax would save families the equivalent of two weeks' worth of grocery money a year.

Recovery council begins meeting with citizens

The 19-member Tornado Recovery Action Council has begun its series of seven meetings in areas hit by the April 27 tornadoes.

Residents have been asked to attend and share storm stories and suggest ideas for future emergency preparedness.

"We are encouraged by the proactive outlook we have witnessed from the community during this process," says executive Director Ron Gray. "Each forum will educate our council members about the issues and needs specific to each community."

Recommendations will be given to Gov. Robert Bentley by mid- January.

A community forum is scheduled Monday 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Central High School gymnasium in Tuscaloosa. The address is 905 15th St.

In addition to forums, TRAC will collect recommendations on websites and social media sites: www.TRACalabama.org, www.facebook.com/TRACalabama.org, and www.twitter.com/TRACalabama.org.

Legislation would help protect storm shelters

U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus, R-Vestavia Hills, has introduced federal legislation to prevent removing or demolishing temporary storm shelters built at schools after the April 27 tornadoes.

Bachus said he sponsored the Community Shelter Protection Act of 2011 in response to a Federal Emergency Management Agency regulation that would force schools to choose between purchasing the shelters or having them removed or demolished.

The bill is cosponsored by U.S. Reps. Robert Aderholt, R-Haleyville, Jo Bonner, R-Mobile, Mo Brooks, R-Huntsville, Mike Rogers, R-Saks, and Terri Sewell, D-Birmingham.

"Taxpayers have spent money to build these shelters and it would be ridiculous to spend more taxpayer money to tear them down," Bachus said.

The legislation would stop FEMA from ordering schools to get rid of storm shelters built for temporary classrooms. School and communities should be able to keep the temporary shelters, Bachus said.

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