



Living It Out

Spring, 2003

The Newsletter of Greater Birmingham Ministries

Tax Reform: Good—and Urgent— For All of Us

Key to State's Future and to Constitutional Reform

“Tax Reform—Good For All of Us” is a bumper sticker that has been seen around the state as a part of the tax reform efforts of the member groups of Alabama Arise. It might well be amended now to read, “Tax Reform: Good—and *Urgent*—for All of Us.”

In his recent State of the State Address, Governor Bob Riley described the current crisis in state funding. Among other items:

- A deficit on \$175 million for this year in the Education Trust Fund
- An additional \$70 million needed to sustain the state's Medicaid program
- An additional \$125 million needed for the Department of Corrections.

In order to achieve a balanced budget as constitutionally mandated, based on current revenues, the General Fund Budget will have to be cut by 20% and the Education Budget will have to be cut by 6%. Such cuts would produce results like these:

- 450,000 people will lose access to health care because of lack of Medicaid funding
- 800,000 meals for the elderly will be eliminated
- 60 Senior Service Centers would be closed, and thousands would lose eligibility for nursing home care.

- The Mental Health budget would be cut by \$38.6 million because of lack of matching funds.
- 3,200 teachers and support personnel would be laid off, in addition to 2,000 already being laid off this spring.
- 734 judicial system employees laid off
- Jury trials suspended indefinitely
- 46 State Troopers laid off from a force already 25% understaffed.

These numbers take no account of needed new initiatives, such as those around public transit.

Governor Riley also noted the excessive earmarking of funds in this state, a process that predetermines 90% of all revenues. The practice not only hamstringing state government, but it creates a situation that favors powerful special interest groups who stay camped out on the processes of state agencies at the expense of average citizens. The lack of public transit dollars in this state is directly attributable to this problem.

This fiscal nightmare is deepened by the fact that our tax system is not only inadequate, but, as has been repeatedly stressed by groups such as GBM and Alabama Arise,

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Dr. Vincent Harding Reminds Birmingham of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Full Vision

This spring marks the 40th anniversary of the Birmingham Campaign, a major chapter in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. As a fitting opening to this year's commemorations, Dr. Vincent Harding was invited to be the keynote speaker at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Unity Breakfast in January, 2003. Dr. Harding was the first director of the King Center in Atlanta and was the major historical authority for the acclaimed film series, Eyes on the Prize. He knew Dr. King personally and was in Birmingham in 1963 with him. Selections from his speech follow below:

“Good morning, friends. I first came to Birmingham—it seems very strange to me now—forty years ago this spring. And having come that long ago the first time, and having been in the midst of the struggle for transformation, and having seen and heard and felt the cost of the transformation, I am deeply impressed with what is here now and what I imagine is in your hearts for what needs yet to come.

“You have to keep working at this. It's crucial work that you are doing. Not simply for the image of the Birmingham, not simply for nostalgic-colored reasons, but because we need to recognize the significance of what a great Jewish rabbi said just ten days before Martin King was assassinated. Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel in speaking to a group of his co-religionists and introducing Dr. King to them, spoke these words, which I think are the words that must hold us to keep our hands on the plow in this work we are doing. Rabbi Heschel said, **‘Martin Luther King, Jr., is a voice, a vision and a way. ... The whole future of America will depend on the impact and the influence of Dr. King.’**

“And so I am simply coming to encourage you to try to hear his *full* voice as clearly as we can, to see all of his vision, to really understand his way. We need to open up to the fullness of the Dream before we can really put it into practice. That is the first great challenge for us here in Birmingham., as well as the challenge for America. Who was this man, and what did he really dream

and believe, and how much of it have we comprehended?

“As I have seen it over the years since the holiday began, we have tended to forget some absolutely crucial aspects of King's message and King's meaning. I think that every King day can offer an opportunity to us, not just to repeat the same old words, not just to have the same race relations dream, not just do the same march on Washington Dream box—all of those are very important. But why every King Day say the same thing, do the same thing, as if there were nothing more to Martin King than that rather narrow confine in which we keep him.

“I think each day like this offers us an opportunity to open up our understanding of King, to hear his voice in a fresh way, see his broadest vision and to recognize the awesome expansiveness of his way. Remember, this was a King, who after he left Birmingham, within a year and a half or so, won the Nobel Peace Prize, not only for what he did in Birmingham, not only for his dream of a new racial unity in America, but this was a King who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his vision of a *world* at peace, in which women and men treat each other as children of God. **This is the King who we so often neglect to say was a follower of Jesus, the Jesus who taught us to say, ‘Our Father.’ Not our exclusive Christian Father. Not our American Father, but Our Father, including God's Iraqi and Vietnamese children. Our Father.**

“This was a King who recognized that his vision of unity had to extend to the *world*. Towards the end of his life, he started using a metaphor that was fascinating. He said that we are residents of a world house, and we have to live and act as if we are all a part of the same house, the same community, the same family. And he was trying to put that into practice, because he recognized that human unity was tied to dealing with the problems that tear humans apart, that human unity required dealing with the problems of world poverty, of world economic exploitation, of opposition to imperialism, colonialism and war. And keep saying that word, ‘war,’ and keep tying to Martin King a determination to fight for a world that goes beyond war.

“At the very end of his life, in the last February of his life, he said, **‘When you remember me, make sure that you remember that I tried to stand up**

against war as a way of solving human problems.’ I don't hear that very much on King Day. We very much need to hear that today. We cannot narrow him to a keeper of better race relations.

“That's very, very important. But listen to what he had to say in 1966, after he had moved into one of the poorest neighborhoods in Chicago. Listen to what he said, (this is a Ph.D. in Philosophical Theology now), **‘I choose to identify with the underprivileged. I choose to identify with the poor. I choose to give my life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity. If it means dying for them, then I am going that way.’**

“Now this is King, hear him. See how expansive this vision was, and understand, please, that each day that we come together around his life, remember that King, even in that solidarity with the poor, refused to confine it to the USA, because he was still praying, ‘Our Father.’ And in the midst of a rising war in Vietnam that was the responsibility primarily of his own country, King said that this solidarity that he had with the poor, as a result of his religious faith and his human compassion, could not be confined to the USA. **‘This solidarity with the poor,’ he said, ‘had to be with more than the poor of America.’** He increasingly chose to speak on behalf of the poor of Vietnam. That was what so much of that speech of 1967 was about. He came and said, ‘I am speaking for the poor of Vietnam. My country is killing them, but I am going to stand up and speak on their behalf.’ That is a King we must not forget. We are going to need him even more in the days ahead.

“Eventually, of course, he became the major public voice against the war, because of the damage it was doing to the poor in America at home and to the poor Vietnamese under the fire of America. Ultimately, he had to stand against the war, he said, because he loved America and was concerned about the soul of his own country. So, he said to us, he said to President Johnson and he said to the Congress, **‘A nation that continues, year after year, to spend more money on military defense than on programs to serve its neediest people is approaching spiritual death.’**

Like you, he knew the dangers to the nation represented by racism, but he never forgot that his vision took in more than racism.

In the last years of his life, please remember that he warned us against three related dangers to our souls, as a country and as individuals. He kept tying them together, not separating them. **He said these three things especially, we have to remember are dangerous to our being.** One is **racism**, and that was very, very clear to him, and he kept working against a racist way of life, but he never stopped there in his last years. He went on to say that, two, is **materialism**—the demand, the desire to have more things, what we would call ‘consumerism’ today. King said that it will eat away at the entrails of our being. And then thirdly, so difficult for us to deal with, especially in 2003, he said that we have to deal with the deadliness of **militarism** in our society, the belief that there are military solutions for the deep needs and problems of the human community.

“That is a challenge you see that thousands of people have taken up this King weekend all over our country, all over the world, and some of those thousands right in front of our doors this morning, reminding us of the Martin



King who said, ‘Beware of the dangers of racism, materialism and militarism, the tendency to believe that armed power can handle the things that need to be done.

“We all need to hear again and again and again his declaration one year exactly before he died, he said, **‘Silence on an issue like this war can be betrayal.’** So, he spoke up and said, ‘Never again will I be silent on an issue that is destroying the soul of our nation and destroying thousands and thousands of little children in Vietnam. The time has come for a real prophecy, and I am willing to go that road.’

“He was willing to do that, even though the President of the United States was on his head, even though Congress and the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and all the great keepers of the wisdom of the society said, ‘You have nothing to do with this, King. Your charge is civil rights.’ In other words, ‘Stay in your place.’ And King knew that his place as a child of the living,

loving Creator God was with all who are suffering, in trouble and in need, so he stayed in his place, continuing to call upon the voices that needed to speak out for the Vietnamese people.

“That’s why these thousands this weekend have gathered together. That’s why one of my friends had a button on that said, ‘I love the children of Iraq and the children of America.’ I could hear Martin King saying that very, very easily. That was his calling. That was why his last campaign is something we need to talk about much, much more than we do. His last campaign he called ‘The Poor People’s Campaign.’ **His last campaign was to gather poor people of every color and ethnicity, from all over this country, to go to Washington with him and to face the government of the United States and to stay there until the government was willing to listen to the word that we must turn away from the war against Vietnam and turn toward a real war against poverty in America and elsewhere.**

That is what he died in the midst of. We don’t honor him by forgetting that. We don’t honor him by ignoring that. We don’t honor him by just continuing to say, ‘I have a dream that one day my little children...’ That’s wonderful, but that’s not enough. King said, ‘I have got to keep on going, I have got to keep on standing, I have got to keep on climbing.’ And if we are really to honor him, we have to keep on going. We have to keep on standing. We have to keep on climbing.

“When we remember King, we need to remember ‘The Poor People’s Campaign,’ and let its goals stay in our memory. Then we might have some new thoughts for today, some thoughts, for example, about an unlimited war on terrorism and unconstitutional war against Iraq. We could think some new courageous thoughts.

“Now I know that just when some of us thought we were getting the racial dream together, here comes a challenge to do something more. But, you see, that was King, always being challenged to do something more. He led that marvelous pilgrimage from Selma to Montgomery, through it, got Lyndon Johnson to do what he said was impossible a few months before, which was to get a Voting Rights Bill passed. And King was just at the height of his power and fame at that point in 1965, and then in Mont-

gomery, when they got there, King said, ‘This is wonderful. We’ve done a beautiful job, but we must keep going.’ And that’s when he tried to lay out his concern for the urban poverty that was so deep in our nation, and still is very deep, too deep in the richest nation in the world.’ King said, ‘We’ve got to take this on.’

“I am closing by asking you to open up your understanding of King. Practice unity, yes, but practice unity that goes across national borders, that goes across religious borders, that goes across economic borders. Let unity be unity, and not just segregated unity, left to occasional black and white gatherings together. Remember King.

“Remember King’s vision that could take a Ph.D. in Philosophical Theology right to the side of garbage workers, to stand with them, and to die in their midst. Let the Birmingham Pledge concerning respect for individuals open itself up to ask, do we respect the individuals who will die under our bombs in Iraq? Open it up. Let there be unity that is truly godly unity. Let it be the unity that took a middle-class African-American Baptist preacher to stand with the Buddhist peasants of Vietnam.

“Let the unity be the unity between the young people, whom we sometimes are afraid of, and us who need to hold them in our arms. Let the unity be between us and the folks in prison who we don’t even think about a lot of the time. Let the unity be unity, Birmingham.

“And when you are worried about whether we can really get into this kind of thing, remember two things. One, that Declaration of Independence was developed by some people who had all kinds of problems and faults, but they were willing to take a chance to try to start a new world. We need to recognize that we are probably capable of doing much more newness than we have probably thought. Let it start it with you, Birmingham. You started some other wonderful things. Let this new unity be a part of what you are doing.

“And remember the second thing is that Rabbi Heschel was right. The whole future of America depends upon the impact and influence of Dr. King. **Be strong. Don’t give up. Birmingham, you’ve done a great deal. You’ve got a great deal more to do. And you can do it.”**



HOPE VI Project Strong on Demolition, But Weak on Hope for Former Residents

Only 57 families out of the original 740 that were living in Metropolitan Gardens at the time of that HABD received its HOPE VI grant are slated to return to the new development, according to the Birmingham News (January 6, 2003). That is less than 8%, a percentage well below the national average of 14%, a figure which itself is already far from encouraging. Displacement of current residents by new development has long been a sign of questionable housing practices in the viewpoint of housing advocates.

Metropolitan Gardens is now almost completely demolished, and only a few residents remain at the site.

Recent studies indicate that the HOPE VI program—a project of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—winds up moving 86% of all current residents of a public housing community with only 14% finally able to return. While some residents find better housing elsewhere, 40% report problems paying rent and utilities and half reported problems paying for food. Indeed, 60% of those who actually received housing vouchers had trouble paying for utilities.

HOPE VI was originally designed to demolish severely distressed public housing communities and to replace them with mixed income developments. Nationally, housing advocates point to the fact that HOPE VI increasingly targets public housing communities sited on prime commercial or investment locations and that there is almost always a net

loss of affordable housing units afterward.

Metropolitan Gardens was generally considered the best public housing community in Birmingham. It could house 910 families. Its demolition and the current HOPE VI development plans will result in a net loss of 540 units of affordable housing for low to moderate income families.

HOPE VI Studies can be found on the website of the Urban Institute: www.urban.org

U.S. House and Senate slash funding to vital programs

During the week of March 10th, the House and Senate Budget Committees approved their fiscal year 2004 budget resolutions. Both versions contain significant cuts to the programs that help poor and hungry people in the U.S. and around the world.

The House version calls for a \$657 million cut in the overall international affairs budget from which poverty focused development assistance programs are funded. It is also projected to cut \$17 billion over ten years in the Food Stamp and Child Nutrition Programs.

The Senate version calls for a \$1 billion reduction in the president's request for the first year of the Millennium Challenge Account, funding it at only \$300 million in FY '04.

In addition to well over \$450 billion in cuts to other social programs, the current budget resolutions also make room for \$726 billion in tax cuts, most of which are targeted to help the wealthiest Americans. Neither budget resolution includes money to pay for the war in Iraq. Especially in tough

economic times, the U.S. does not need to cut programs to those who are most vulnerable while also cutting taxes for those at the top of the economic scale.

Both the House and Senate will debate and vote on the budget resolutions this week. After each chamber approves its version of the resolution, a conference will be held to negotiate differences and decide a final budget resolution as early as April 11, 2003.

This information is based on alerts from Bread for the World and from the Food Research Action Council (FRAC). You can monitor developments at their websites: http://www.bread.org/issues/rise_to_the_challenge/recent_developments.html and at <http://www.frac.org/html/news/calltocongress.htm>.

Advocates Refuse to Give Up until Landlord/Tenant Bill Becomes Reality

Alabama still remains one of only two states with no law to define responsibilities of landlords and tenants—even when a tenant's home is unlivable through landlord neglect. Alabama Arise and other groups have sought several times to work out a mutually acceptable bill with the Alabama Association of Realtors and the Homebuilders Association, only to have each agreement cancelled by one of the two real estate groups at the end of the negotiations.

At the request of Representative Laura Hall, this year the Alabama Law Institute has drafted a new version of a bill entitled the Uniform Residential Landlord/Tenant Act (<http://www.ali.state.al.us/billstatus.html>). Arise is working with the Institute, and there is hope that a meaningful,

fair law can finally be enacted.

Church Leaders Call for End to Juvenile Death Penalty in Alabama

On February 24, 2003, leaders of several Christian traditions in Alabama signed a letter addressed to the Governor, the Attorney General and the Alabama Legislature calling for an end to the execution of juveniles in Alabama. The signers included the bishops of the Roman Catholic Diocese, the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Alabama, the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, together with representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Only two nations in the world execute people under age 18, and only 22 U.S. states do so. Alabama has one of the lowest age limits for executions at 16 years of age.

(From *Tax Reform*, page 1)

our tax system is grossly unfair to the poorest people in the state. Governor Riley cited information familiar to anyone with an awareness of our tax system.

“In Alabama we start taxing income at \$4600. This is not just wrong—it is immoral. This forces so many of our working poor and elderly who are on a fixed income to bear a disproportionate burden. Quite often, this means the most vulnerable among us are having to decide between buying prescription drugs, paying the power bill or putting food on the table. No one can defend such a system.”

The governor has accurately described an injustice that has dragged on for far, far too long. The poor and elderly are being squeezed on two fronts with the slashing of essential services (and the lack of currently inadequate ones, such as transportation) and the disproportionate share of the burden they bear through our state’s reliance on sales taxes and our incredibly low income tax threshold. Poor people cannot simply cut back on expenses to lower their sales tax expenses, since virtually all their expenses are for essential items. Alabama has never followed the lead of other states by removing the sales taxes from groceries.

Now our current fiscal crisis demands new focus on our tax system, and the question is whether we as a state will find the courage and commitment to look out for the interests of all, and not just a few nor just ourselves individually.

Already, people such as Professor Susan Pace Hamill, who has written a moral critique of our current tax system based on Christian ethical teaching, has been attacked

by groups such as the Christian Coalition for speaking up for tax reform. And even Governor Riley’s limited and preliminary initiatives around constitutional reform have come under attack.

Greater Birmingham Ministries has maintained that tax reform would be the ultimate test of any constitutional reform effort, and GBM has historically been concerned that efforts toward constitutional reform might try to sidestep tax reform efforts. Powerful forces, such as ALFA, have repeatedly blocked tax reform efforts and have acted as guardians of the status quo.

While there are obvious barriers, GBM maintains hope that the current movements toward constitutional reform, along with the urgent need to face the long-neglected fiscal needs of the state, will come together to create a new day in Alabama in which tax fairness merges with genuinely democratic public processes to produce an adequately funded and maintained state government that serves all Alabamians.

Numerous faith communities have called for comprehensive tax reform, with particular attention to its impact on the poor. Alabama Arise is currently working in Montgomery to study and propose the best options.

Susan Pace Hamill’s writings on Tax Reform in Alabama can be found at <http://www.law.ua.edu/directory/bio/shamill.html>.

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Sponsoring Faith Communities

African Methodist Episcopal Church
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Episcopal Church USA
Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Greek Orthodox
Lutheran Ministries of Alabama
Presbyterian Church USA
Roman Catholic Church
Sixteenth Street Baptist Church
Temple Beth-El
Temple Emanu-El
Unitarian Church of Birmingham
United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church

2.5 Million Americans
Work Full-Time but
Still Live in Poverty.

—From *The Appleseed Foundation*,
working in support of a national living
wage. www.appleseeds.org

Louise Branscomb Inducted Into Alabama Women's Hall of Fame

The late Dr. Louise Branscomb was recently inducted into the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame at a ceremony at Judson College in Marion, AL. Dr. Branscomb was an untiring advocate for human beings, their well-being and their rights. She was one of the first women to become a licensed physician in the state of Alabama, and she served in numerous capacities in the community. She was a long-time board member of Greater Birmingham Ministries, and the conference room at GBM is named in her honor. A seat on the Housing Authority Board is also named in honor of her long-time commitment to low-income residents. The plaque in the new display in the Hall of Fame reads as follows:

LOUISE H. BRANSCOMB
1901-1999
PIONEER FEMALE PHYSICIAN DEDICATED TO BRINGING BETTER HEALTH TO INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY. METHODIST CHURCH AND CIVIC LEADER. WWII MAJOR IN THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE. INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN ACTIVIST FOR RACIAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS. PHILANTHROPIST.

May her spirit always be moving forward with us—prodding us, as she always did, when necessary.

GBM Direct Services Report		
	January-March 15 2003	January-December 2002
Total Number of Families Assisted	565	3,509
Total Number of People Assisted	1,350	8,976
Total Children	536	4,306
Number of Food Bags Distributed	1,313	6,935
Value of Food Given	\$55,146	\$227,297
Number of Families Receiving Clothing	193	1,096
Qualified Financial Requests Received	\$42,265	\$236,370
Financial Assistance Given	\$19,099	\$123,671
Total Funds and Value of Goods Given	\$77,790	\$409,543

Visit GBM on the web at www.gbm.org

2003 Marks Anniversaries for Two GBM Staff Members

Scott Douglas marked 10 years as GBM's Executive Director in February, 2003, and GBM will soon celebrate the 20th anniversary of the arrival of Sarah Price as Lead Staff for Direct Services. "GBM is enormously indebted to Scott and Sarah for all their work and dedication to GBM and to the people of this community," said Carolyn Crawford, a board member who has been with GBM from its earliest days. "They are simply remarkable people, and GBM is honored to be so closely associated with them. We congratulate them and look forward to many more years of working with them."

Fannie Lou Hamer Project Receives 501(c)3 Status

Congratulations to the board and staff of the Fannie Lou Hamer Project on receiving its 501(c)3 non-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service. GBM had sponsored the project while an independent board and organization was set up.

The Fannie Lou Hamer Project is named for the dedicated Civil Rights Activist in Mississippi who became a national figure in the founding of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1968. FLHP advocates for an authentically democratic campaign finance system that ensures political power and voice to everyone.

The Fannie Lou Hamer Project can be found on the web at www.flhp.org.

Campaign to Establish a National Housing Trust Fund



The National Housing Trust Fund Campaign is working to establish a National Housing Trust Fund to build and preserve 1.5 million units of rental housing for the lowest income families over the next 10 years.

Why do we need a National Housing Trust Fund?

- There is a real need for a federal commitment to housing. In the absence of place to call home, it is foolhardy to expect people to succeed as citizens. Yet in no jurisdiction in the country can a full-time minimum wage worker afford the fair market rent. We propose funding to build housing so those workers can afford safe, adequate, affordable housing.
- **Lack of housing is stalling economic development.** Businesses simply will not locate in communities where their workers cannot live. And, equally important in these times of economic uncertainty, housing production is a proven economic stimulus. Over time, a federal investment of \$5 billion can be expected to leverage funds resulting in 1.8 million new jobs and \$50 billion in wages.
- **Trust funds are a proven way to build needed housing.** More than 170 state and local housing trust funds have produced hundreds of thousands of units across the country.
- **75% of the funding devoted to extremely low income families.** The Trust Fund will fund housing for the people that need it most—people working at minimum wage, living on social security income, and other low income families.
- **The housing will remain affordable for the long haul.** Units constructed or rehabilitated with Trust Fund dollars will remain affordable for at least 50 years.
- **The funding will go 60% to local governments and 40% to states,** allowing them to use already existing mechanisms to distribute the funding in a way that best benefits their area.
- **25% of the funding is for homeownership to**

allow lower-income Americans the chance to own their own homes, while 75% is for rental units to house those who cannot afford to buy.

- **No more than 50% of the units can be for extremely low-income households in a given development** to assure that we are not segregating poor families.
- **Developing housing the right way,** by encouraging placement near jobs, transportation, and services, and giving preference to projects that incorporate energy efficiency or in communities with inclusionary zoning laws.

How can we help get a National Housing Trust Fund?

With hard work and commitment, together we can make real progress in solving the housing crisis. Organizations can get involved in the National Housing Trust Fund Campaign in a number of ways:

- Endorse the Campaign and encourage others to endorse
- Contact your legislators about the need for a National Housing Trust Fund—calls, faxes and visits are all very effective.

For more information, visit www.nhtf.org or call 202-662-1530 x223.

Still Wondering Why Poverty Can Be So Tough to Escape?

In order to be economically self-sufficient in Birmingham,

- a single adult with no children needs to earn **\$8.09** per hour to be able to meet his/her basic needs.
- a single parent with one child must earn **\$12.91** per hour.
- a single parent with two children must earn **\$15.20** per hour.
- two adults with two children must *each* earn **\$9.69** per hour.

Source: *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Alabama*, February, 2003. A Study Prepared for the Arise Citizens' Policy Project. (www.arisecitizens.org)

Alabama Arise Priorities for 2003

Alabama Arise is a state-wide coalition of 140 faith and community organizations in Alabama seeking justice for low-income people at the Alabama Legislature. This year Arise has chosen the following priorities:

- **Tax Reform:** In Alabama, the lowest-paid fifth of families pay 10.3% of their incomes in state and local taxes; the top 1% pay 3.7%.
- **Housing:** Alabama is one of two states with no law to define responsibilities of landlords and tenants—even when tenants' homes are unlivable.
- **Moratorium on Executions:** Alabama should stop killing people on death row for three years while it reviews the fairness of the capital punishment system.
- **Unfair Lending Practices:** Arise opposes legislation to legalize payday loans with an Annual Percentage Rate of 429%.
- **Public Transportation:** It is past time to remove Alabama's constitutional prohibition against spending gas taxes on public transportation.

- **Budget Priorities:** Arise seeks the first increase in state child care funds since 1988, full funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program, and adequate funding for Medicaid.
- **Constitutional Reform:** The 1901 Constitution was designed by the powerful to deny most citizens access to what is rightfully theirs: a government accountable to its people. Until we get a new constitution, all our advocacy efforts are at a disadvantage.
- **Voting Rights for Ex-Felons:** Alabama should automatically restore the voting rights of ex-felons who have paid their debt to society.
- **Alternative Documentation for Driver's Licenses:** Alabama should allow citizens of other countries who do not have a Social Security number to use other forms of identification, such as consular identification or passport numbers, to obtain a driver's license.

*Alabama Arise can be found on the web at alarise.org. **Arise Citizens' Policy Project has just published a revealing new study on self-sufficiency in Alabama, found at www.arisecitizens.org. (See page 7 for Birmingham data.)***

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Tax Reform:
Good—and Urgent—
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Recalling the
Full Vision of
Martin Luther
King, Jr.
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