

## Voting yes on September 9<sup>th</sup> is the only right thing to do

By Susan Pace Hamill

On September 9<sup>th</sup> we have a chance to propel Alabama a giant step forward by voting in favor of Governor Riley's tax and accountability plan. This plan significantly reduces the tax burden inflicted on the poorest Alabamians by exempting families in poverty from income taxes, raises enough revenue to cover the over \$600 million shortfall, starts the process of rebuilding our vastly inadequate education system, and requires substantial accountability. Well over half of Alabama's families will pay the same or less taxes. Although the wealthiest Alabamians will pay more, Alabama's taxes will still be among the lowest in the nation and below the southeastern average.

Numerous economic arguments solidly support the governor's plan. However the most compelling reason to vote yes on September 9<sup>th</sup> is that we have no other moral alternative given that most of us claim the teachings of Jesus Christ as the moral compass guiding our lives. As Christians with the right to vote we are responsible for the injustice that our tax system inflicts on the poor. A system that: taxes the poorest Alabamians proportionally nearly three times greater than the wealthiest; allows the largest landowners to get away with paying obscenely low property taxes; and leaves most of our public schools, especially those in rural areas, with outdated textbooks and substandard facilities.

As Christians we can no longer tolerate this injustice. We must, as the Reverend Henry Parsley recently put it, Agive one another a leg up on life, the basic building blocks of a healthy, educated, contributing life. Even though the plan is not perfect, because it moves our state closer to the standards of justice our faith demands, the only right thing to do is to vote yes on September 9<sup>th</sup>.

Then why would anyone be tempted to vote against Governor Riley's plan?

The most significant reason is greed B that is a harsh term to use, but when you think about it, it is true. Some of the wealthiest Alabamians who are not paying their fair share of Alabama's tax burden want to keep it that way, even if it means continuing the punishing taxes on the poor and condemning them to always remain poor. Instead of being honest, they are distorting statistics in order to falsely convince others that reforms are not needed. For example, they are claiming that Alabama's education spending is close to the middle of the pack while failing to reveal that we are nearly dead last in the nation on educational spending per student. They are also inflating Alabama's state and local tax burden as a percentage of personal income, while failing to tell you that the true figure is practically meaningless because it lumps the poorest and wealthiest Alabamians together.

And finally, by trotting out a very questionable economic study done in Boston Massachusetts that relies on a number of erroneous assumptions, those seeking to defeat Governor Riley's plan are falsely threatening a massive loss of jobs, capital investment and disposable income. And they are not telling you that Dr. Carl Ferguson, the director of the Center For Business and Economic Research at the University of Alabama and a well respected economist who has studied Alabama's economy for over 20 years, has vigorously disputed this out of state study and strongly supports our governor's plan.

Ignorance also stands as a serious obstacle to real reform. Those spreading lies motivated by

greed are leading many poor and lower middle class Alabamians astray into believing they will be hurt, when in fact they will be helped the most by the governor's plan. Those of you engaging in these despicable tactics need to keep in mind that there is nothing that offends the teachings of Jesus more than using lies to condemn the least of these to a life that you yourself would not live.

Which brings me to the final stumbling block - apathy - that not only threatens this plan but all future reforms that Alabama must accomplish to live up to its Judeo-Christian heritage. It is not enough for Alabamians of goodwill, especially Christians, to just vote yes on September 9<sup>th</sup>. You must energetically and loudly promote Governor Riley's plan to your neighbors, friends and colleagues, your church and civic clubs, and throughout the highways of Alabama. And you must actively and steadfastly continue your efforts for as long as it takes to establish fair taxation in Alabama. Otherwise, greed and ignorance will condemn our state to remain stagnated at the bottom and the enormous gap between who we say we are, and who we actually are, will continue to grow.

*Susan Pace Hamill, a Professor of Law at the University of Alabama School of Law, can be reached at [shamilllaw.ua.edu](mailto:shamilllaw.ua.edu) or <http://www.law.ua.edu/directory/bio/shamill.html> . She recently completed a masters in theological studies (MTS) degree at the Beeson Divinity School, Samford University and is the mother of two children in the Tuscaloosa City Schools system. This editorial is based on her recently published paperback book, *THE LEAST OF THESE: FAIR TAXES AND THE MORAL DUTY OF CHRISTIANS*.*