



Reports of ACORN's Death Greatly Exaggerated

Following the announcement on Sunday that the ACORN Association Board had “approved a set of steps to responsibly manage the process of bringing its operations to a close over the coming months,” spokesman Kevin Whelan tried to explain it away by saying, “It’s really declining revenue in the face of a series of attacks by partisan operatives and right-wing activists that have taken away our ability to raise the resources we need.”



Bertha Lewis, Acorn CEO, expanded on why Acorn was closing its doors: “ACORN has faced a series of well-orchestrated, relentless, well-funded right wing attacks that are unprecedented since the McCarthy era. The videos were a manufactured, sensational story that led to rush to judgment and an unconstitutional act by Congress.”

Mark Twain is alleged to have said, in jest, that “reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.” And so are the reasons behind the PR statement by Whelan and Lewis.

Indeed, the [videos](#) sponsored by BigGovernment.com and released last September were the final straw that broke ACORN’s back, but for nearly 40 years, accusations of voter fraud, misuse of funds, and embezzlement of millions of dollars have haunted ACORN. In fact, the report by the GOP staff of the House Committee on Government Oversight and Reform was so broad and wide-ranging that it has been extensively reviewed [elsewhere](#) on this site.

From the very first sentence from that report, however, the degree of corruption involved is revealed:

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) has repeatedly and deliberately engaged in systematic fraud...ACORN hides behind a paper wall of nonprofit corporate protections to conceal a criminal conspiracy on the part of its directors, to launder federal money in order to pursue a partisan political agenda and to manipulate the American public.” Described as a “complex structure designed to conceal illegal activities, to use taxpayer and tax-exempt dollars for partisan political purposes, and to distract investigators...ACORN is a chess game...which has evaded taxes, obstructed justice, engaged in self-dealing, and aided and abetted a cover-up of embezzlement.

According to Louisiana’s Attorney General, Buddy Caldwell, the embezzlement scheme directly implicated Dale Rathke, the brother of ACORN founder Wade Rathke, and may have involved as much as \$5 million. The report exposed connections to former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich, Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown, and President Obama. “These campaigns,” the report continued, “received financial and personnel [assistance] as part of a scheme to use taxpayer monies to support a partisan political



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agenda...and are a clear violation of numerous tax and election laws.”

Attempts of minimize and marginalize the accusations made in the report with distracting references to “right-wing attacks” succeed only in clarifying the extent of the frauds committed. Nearly 70 ACORN employees have been convicted in 12 states for voter registration fraud, which resulted in “one-third of the 1.3 million voter registration cards turned in by ACORN in 2008 [to be] invalid.”

Within days of the videos appearing last September, Congress moved with surprising alacrity to “defund” the organization, with the Senate voting 83-7 and the House 346-75 to end federal funding for the group. The Census Bureau terminated its Partnership Agreement on September 11th, 2009, saying officially that “ACORN’s affiliation with 2010 Census promotion has caused sufficient concern in the general public, has indeed become a distraction from our mission, and may even become a discouragement to public cooperation, negatively impacting 2010 Census efforts...we no longer have confidence that our national partnership agreement is being effectively managed through your many local offices [and] we therefore have decided to terminate the partnership.”

President Obama, who served as legal counsel for ACORN prior to his run for the presidency, tried to put some distance between himself and the tainted group. White House spokesman Robert Gibbs claimed that Obama didn’t know much about the group: “Frankly, it’s not really something I’ve followed closely. I didn’t even know that ACORN was getting a whole lot of federal money.”

Conservative commentators [delighted](#) to point out that the \$8.5 Billion (with a capital B) that was scheduled to be sent to ACORN had been stopped, one of whom said “I’ll know we’ve won this battle when ACORN’s former attorney [Obama] turns his back on these radical friends.”

A comment from an unnamed source inside ACORN [said](#) that although the board has decided to disband, they are reorganizing under new names. This was confirmed by Iowa Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), a long-time critic of ACORN: “I don’t think we’re done with this. This is a big step in the right direction because I believe they are a corrupt, criminal enterprise.”

For instance, in New York City the ACORN office now has a new sign: “New York Communities for Change.” In Massachusetts, the “new” ACORN group, called “New England United for Justice” lists Maude Hurd as its president, the same Maude Hurd who serves as president for ACORN itself. Matthew Vadum, an investigator for the Capital Research Center, points out that ACORN Housing has changed its name to Affordable Housing Centers of America, Inc., and other ACORN-connected groups include Arkansas Community Organizations, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, and Missourians for Reform Empowerment. “This is a trick, a public relations trick to dupe Congress and the American people to think they have gone away and that have not,” says Vadum. “The same people are running the new chapters that have sprung up and in some cases, out of the same offices.”

Consequently, the death of ACORN has, unfortunately, been greatly exaggerated

Photo: In Chicago, Michael Shea, Executive Director of Affordable Housing Centers of America, formally known as ACORN Housing: AP Images



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