



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on October 8, 2009

Where There's Smoke, There's ACORN

More than one member of Congress wants to know how ACORN, the leftist scam that former board members call a criminal conspiracy, nearly collected close to \$1 million in federal funding for fire prevention and safety.

The *Washington Times* reports that ACORN [was slated to receive](#) 80 percent of the Homeland Security grants intended for fire prevention and safety programs in Louisiana. The paper [initially reported](#) that ACORN had received the money, but the Obama administration then announced that the grant [was killed](#) before the money went out.



Still, Rep. [Dale Issa](#) (R-Calif.) ranking minority member of the [House Oversight and Government Reform Committee](#), and Maine's [Susan Collins](#), ranking Republican on the [Senate Homeland Security Committee](#), wonder why ACORN was slated to receive the grant to begin with. "We are perplexed as to how this organization would even be considered for a first-responder grant," [they wrote](#) in a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano.

In July, Issa's committee staff released a report [alleging that ACORN](#) is essentially a criminal conspiracy trespassing the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, or [RICO](#), which has traditionally been used to prosecute the Mob.

Sen. [David Vitter](#) (R-La.) wasn't happy about the grant either. On September 22, [he wrote](#) to Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano. "I request that you rescind this grant based on a history of abuse of federal dollars by ACORN and their clear lack of expertise in this area," Vitter wrote. A week before Vitter wrote to Napolitano, two other legislators also inquired about the money. Reps. [Gus Bilirakis](#) (R-Fla.) and [Mike Rogers](#) (R-Mich.) members of the House Committee on Homeland Security, [wrote to Napolitano](#) with a request to rescind the money.

The cabinet agency froze the money, [the Times reports](#), after Congress passed a spending bill on September 30.

ACORN Nearly Got Smoke-detector Money

The funds were frozen because the organization's employees have embroiled it in two major scandals. Last month, an undercover filmmaker and a colleague [recorded ACORN](#) employees [advising the pair](#) about [setting up brothels](#) and [smuggling underage Salvadoran girls](#) across the border to work as prostitutes. The pair also filmed ACORN employees advising them how to skirt federal tax laws.

That revelation, coming on the heels of a nationwide investigation of ACORN's [voter-registration fraud](#), rattled the agency right down to its roots. Its political support in Washington [ducked into the bushes](#). The Census Bureau and IRS cut off ties with the group, and even worse, the Senate and House ended ACORN's federal funding, more than \$50 million since 1994. [ACORN's former attorney](#), Barack Obama,



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said the group should be investigated.

That's why the Obama administration scotched this year's fire-prevention money, but that still leaves the question of how a group that deals with housing issues received a grant to spend money on projects it is unqualified to manage. So when news of the latest grant surfaced, Congress began asking questions.

"Additionally, we ask that you determine why ACORN, which does not prepare its staff in emergency management, received first-responder grants that are more appropriately given to 'a first-responder organization,'" Issa and Collins [wrote to Napolitano](#). "It is disturbing that ACORN was awarded a grant when fire departments all over the country are struggling to make ends meet and get the equipment and training they need to protect their local communities. A grant of nearly \$1 million in Homeland Security funding was awarded to ACORN, money that might have been awarded to fire departments."

The grants, [Bilirakis and Rogers wrote](#), are for organizations "recognized for their experience and expertise in fire prevention and safety programs and activities." The Congressmen said they were unaware that ACORN was recognized for its firefighting skills.

Issa and Collins want the Department's inspectors general to investigate the agency's grant-making to ACORN.

In 2007, [the Times reported](#) in its first story, ACORN collected half of the state's share of federal money designated for fire prevention and safety.

ACORN Scandals

This latest revelation comes after another tough few days for the leftist operation. Earlier this week, the Attorney General for Louisiana, [Buddy Caldwell](#), announced that an embezzlement scheme thought to have cost ACORN just under \$1 million [was closer to \\$5 million](#). Caldwell [hit the group hard](#) in a subpoena, [citing the report](#) from Issa's committee staff.

Unsurprisingly, ACORN's chief organizer, Bertha Lewis, [denied that ACORN](#) lost that much money in the embezzlement. The embezzler was Dale Rathke, the brother of the group's founder, Wade.

The embezzlement scheme led eight former ACORN directors to form the [ACORN 8](#), which has [filed a criminal complaint](#) with the U.S. Justice Department claiming that ACORN is a criminal conspiracy.



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