

For Immediate Release:
Thursday, October 1, 2009

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Standing Up for ACORN

Washington, DC – ACORN announced that former Massachusetts Attorney General Scott Harshbarger was appointed to lead an independent inquiry into the “organizational systems and processes” of the embattled group’s social services and will make public the results of that inquiry.

The following are statements by leaders of progressive organizations in support of ACORN and its efforts to get this important organization back on track.

Statement by Nan Aron, President, Alliance for Justice

“There have been significant problems at ACORN over the years. But in their response to some made-for-YouTube incidents, Congress stepped out of its legislative role and rushed to judgment, acting as judge, jury, and prosecutor. That is not how we should do things in this country.

“Nonprofit organizations that stand up for the powerless in our society and that provide vital services in our communities have never been needed more than they are today.

“As ACORN takes steps to get its house in order, Congress should take a deep breath and give this process time to work.”

Statement by Deepak Bhargava, Executive Director of the Center for Community Change

“Since its founding in 1970, ACORN has made important contributions to community organizing. While there have been significant problems recently at ACORN, it has demonstrated the potential of local organizations to join together for national impact. It has won ground-breaking victories for low income communities on issues such as housing, community reinvestment, predatory lending, and living wage standards. It has stood up for the interests of the poor and given voice to the concerns of people who are too often ignored. The world is a better place because of the work done by ACORN. For these reasons, ACORN deserves a chance to review and reform its organizational systems and processes.”

Statement by Wade Henderson, President of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

“There’s no question that ACORN has made some painful mistakes, but unlike some other government contractors and Wall Street firms whose actions have had more serious consequences, ACORN hasn’t run from its problems. Instead, it swiftly fired the staffers in the now-infamous videotapes and immediately ordered retraining of its other employees. It also took the unprecedented step of retaining former Massachusetts Attorney General Scott Harshbarger to lead an independent investigation of this incident and other problems.

“Whether providing Katrina relief, fighting high-cost predatory loans, or working to reduce poverty, ACORN has done work for almost 40 years that no other national organization is doing for poor and minority communities. You wouldn’t know that from listening to ACORN’s critics.

“So let’s keep things in perspective. ACORN is not the scourge that some right-wing shouting heads would like the public to believe. It’s an organization with a valuable mission that has made some missteps and is trying valiantly to correct them. We support ACORN’s efforts to put its house in order. And ACORN deserves the chance to earn the public’s trust once again.”

Statement by USAction Program Director Alan Charney

“Given the tremendous amount of good work ACORN has done, and the important work it must do in the future, we support the appointment of former Massachusetts Attorney General Scott Harshbarger to conduct an independent inquiry.

“It is imperative that concerns over ACORN’s practices – some legitimate, others less so – be investigated and addressed in a timely manner so that ACORN can continue to do what it does best: provide assistance to low-income homeowners, many of whom are facing foreclosure in this time of economic stress. Until the inquiry is complete, Congress should resist political pressure and remember that ACORN is important and indispensable to millions of Americans who often do not have a place at the table, including people of color and immigrants.”

Statement by Robert L. Borosage, Co-Director, Campaign for America’s Future

“ACORN has a proud record of serving the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. It reaches out, helps them organize, registers them to vote and gets them to the polls, provides counseling that protects them from predatory lenders, and much more. So it is not surprising that ACORN became the bête noire of Karl Rove and the rabid right. Rove traduced US Attorneys, demanding that they prosecute non-existent voter fraud. Right-wing zealots made fools of themselves arguing that ACORN’s support of the Community

Reinvestment Act was the central cause of the financial collapse. A large organization with hundreds of offices and thousands of staff members and volunteers, ACORN has plenty of management challenges. So a right-wing hit squad could film a couple of staff members saying idiotic things. But YouTube ignominy and right-wing hostility is not grounds for persecuting an organization that has devoted its energy and resources to empowering the poorest among us. At the Campaign for America's Future, we are proud to have worked with ACORN in the past and look forward to doing so in the future."

Statement by NAACP President Ben Jealous

"We are deeply troubled by the despicable "railroading" strategy being employed by anti-democratic zealots to bring down the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and end their invaluable service to poor and disadvantaged communities. This is particularly disturbing considering that there are a number of official investigations presently underway to determine if indeed they are actually guilty of the accusations being made of them.

"In this time of economic crisis, with homelessness and unemployment on the rise, we need organizations that are willing to work with families and communities that are underserved to help coordinate and bring their plight to those elected to serve their interests. Though many find it hard to believe with the onslaught of negative and too often disingenuous stories about ACORN, they have a long-standing legacy of empowering those seeking a better life in our nation. Standing true to our American principles, we must allow all of the evidence to come forward before casting judgment."

Equal Justice Society Statement

"The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) has championed the rights of low and moderate income level families for more than three decades. With the backing of 400,000 member families in about 75 cities across 40 states, ACORN has become a target of the Right Wing de-legitimization machine. Just as Van Jones was recently attacked with half-truths and outright lies in order to remove him from his position, so have the same forces politically assaulted ACORN for years.

"As promoters of racial, social and economic justice, the Equal Justice Society continues to support ACORN, its mission and its constituents. We do not support any actions that will further impair the ability of low and moderate income people to seek and access much-needed assistance. Thus, we find it regrettable that the House took the first steps to eliminate federal funding for ACORN's services. Instead, we believe the process for seeking the truth and proper consequences includes awaiting the findings of Scott Harshbarger and holding only the necessary people accountable for any wrongdoing.

Statement from Nathan Newman, Executive Director, Progressive States Network

“For decades, ACORN has been a staunch advocate for working families, from working to raise the minimum wage to fighting foreclosures to promoting paid sick days. We should not allow a right-wing media circus to either overshadow that good work or substitute for a sober review of any internal processes that need to be improved in the organization.”

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