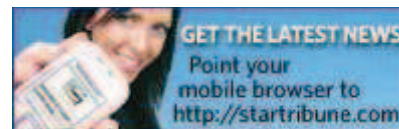


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Katherine Kersten: Worst trouble with ACORN is at the polls

Unless you've been stuck in the Gobi Desert, you've read the headlines about the scandal at ACORN -- the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. Earlier this month, ACORN staffers in four states were caught giving not-so-sage advice to two journalists, posing as a pimp and a prostitute, on how to defraud the government, cheat on taxes and wangle a mortgage for a home-based brothel.

ACORN was once the darling of Democrats for its support of every item on the left-wing wish list. Suddenly, its employees can hardly find a Democrat who will answer their phone calls. When the U.S. Senate voted on Sept. 14 to cut off federal housing dollars for ACORN, the tally was a lopsided 83-7.

ACORN's foibles may seem largely irrelevant here in Minnesota, where the organization has so far been able to keep its nose relatively clean.

But ACORN does have a special place in its heart for at least one prominent Minnesota politician. Last year, it showered praise on Al Franken, endorsing his run for the U.S.

Senate. Franken returned the esteem: "I'm thrilled and honored to receive this endorsement," he gushed in a press release. He added that he was "more motivated than ever to work with ACORN."

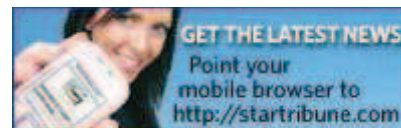
I'm not suggesting that Franken had any association with the folks behind ACORN's recent scandal. Indeed, when the Senate voted to defund ACORN, he got religion and joined the pack.

It's worth recalling, however, that ACORN is best-known for its massive voter-registration campaigns, which focus relentlessly on getting Democrats elected in targeted states. Here its record is appalling -- and goes to the heart of our democratic electoral system.

In October 2008, ACORN announced triumphantly that it had registered about 1.3 million new voters in 18 battleground states, among them Minnesota. A few weeks later, however, the director of Project Vote -- an ACORN affiliate -- acknowledged to the New York Times that election officials had rejected about 400,000 of those, for reasons including duplicate registrations, incomplete forms and (in the Times' words) "fraudulent submissions from low-paid field workers trying to please their supervisors."

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Nothing new here. ACORN's registration drives "routinely produce fraudulent registrations," according to a staff report released in July 2009 by the ranking Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. The report describes ACORN as "a criminal conspiracy" and details violations ranging from unpaid taxes to a million-dollar embezzlement and cover-up. "To date," the report says, "nearly 70 ACORN employees have been convicted in 12 states for voter-registration fraud."

The latest such scandal broke a few weeks ago, when authorities in Florida accused 11 ACORN workers of falsifying information on 888 voter-registration forms.

In May 2009, Nevada's attorney general charged ACORN and two employees with 39 felonies. Authorities raided ACORN offices after complaints about numerous forms with false addresses and names -- including the starting lineup of the Dallas Cowboys. Forty-eight percent of forms turned in were "clearly fraudulent," according to a Las Vegas election official. ACORN recruited felons living in transitional housing in Las Vegas to act as canvassers and promised illegal bonuses if they signed up more than 20 new voters a day.

ACORN's practices can make fraud difficult to detect. For example, "at election offices around the country, ACORN workers are famous for waiting until registration deadline to dump thousands of new documents on overworked clerks -- making it harder for them to fully vet the registration forms," according to the New York Post.

As a result, fraud often only comes to light by chance. Fraud "has been discovered by cursory checks or by accident," John Samples, an election expert at the Cato Institute, told the Post. "There's a lot more out there to be discovered."

Here in Minnesota, ACORN has boasted of playing a major role in the 2008 elections. It claims to have registered 43,000 new voters, which it describes as 75 percent of the state's new registrations. Franken's margin of victory in the Senate race was razor-thin: 312 votes out of about 3 million cast. And Minnesota's laws on proof of voter eligibility are notoriously loose. Did ACORN folks pull some fast ones to help get their favorite son Franken elected -- a win that handed Democrats the 60-vote, veto-proof majority that they needed to enact their liberal agenda?

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Secretary of State Mark Ritchie assures us that Minnesota's system of voter verification protects electoral integrity.

But here's an uncomfortable fact: Ritchie himself was endorsed by the now-notorious ACORN and elected with its help.

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