



Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

To: Interested Parties

From: Cleveland ACORN

Date: October 8, 2008

Re: The Truth About ACORN's Voter Registration Drive

With less than a month left until Election Day, we want to take this opportunity to update you on ACORN's work to turn the unprecedented excitement of this election season into a powerful and lasting movement for change.

Nationwide, ACORN's voter registration drive concluded Monday October 6th and we helped register over 1,300,000 voters—most of them from low-income, African-American, and Latino communities. This is the largest and most successful drive in our history, conducted in a total of 21 states, with the largest efforts focusing on 16 states, including AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, KY, LA, MI, MN, MO, NV, NM, OH, PA, TX, and WI. Our largest successes included over 148,000 registrations in Pennsylvania, over 152,000 in Florida, more than 217,000 in Michigan and over 238,000 in Ohio. Roughly half of these voters are under thirty, and for many of them this will be their first vote ever.

Beyond registering new voters, we are continuing our work to educate and mobilize these new voters around local and national issues. Voter registration is just the first step in building the next generation of community leaders and activists who will continue to organize for change in our neighborhoods for years to come.

Our historic registration drive has received national attention you may have noticed on the front page of the [Wall Street Journal](#), which profiled the tireless efforts of Denver ACORN member Stephanie Willis, who has personally helped register more than 2,000 voters this election season. "I wasn't going to vote," one of her registrants is quoted as saying, "but that lady right there, she can make anybody vote." Or you may have seen the story on voter registration in [The Nation](#) this month, where Christopher Hayes discusses how difficult—and how important—voter registration drives really are.

The *Nation* article also points out that ACORN's success in registering millions of low-income and minority voters has made it "something of a right-wing bogeyman." As a result, there have been an increasing drumbeat of stories about investigations of former ACORN workers for turning in incomplete, erroneous, duplicate, or fraudulent voter registration applications. Predictably, partisan forces have tried to use these isolated incidents to incite fear of the "bogeyman" of "widespread voter fraud." But we want to take this opportunity to set the record straight and tell you how these incidents really illustrate everything that ACORN is doing right.



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In Milwaukee and Cleveland, for example, election officials are examining a few hundred bad applications, less than 1% of the tens of thousands of registrations that ACORN staff have collected in each of those cities. While partisans try to spin even this tiny margin of error to spread the myth of “voter fraud” and justify further barriers to voting like strict voter-ID laws, the truth is that many of these “bad” applications represent nothing more sinister than commonplace errors by voters. ACORN has developed one of the most sophisticated quality-control and voter-verification systems around. Every single application is examined for completeness, and tagged and bundled to associate it with the crew member who gathered it. Registrations are entered into a database by an outside vendor, and call centers make several attempts to call each registrant to verify information. Where we are able to do so, ACORN works to “cure” incomplete registrations by contacting voters to get information about missing or inaccurate entries—such as county or zip-code information—that could get a registration rejected.

ACORN turns applications in to election officials in three stacks: those we have verified, those we were unable to independently verify, and those we know are problematic. **In most states we are required to turn in every signed application, including the ones we know have problems.** In a few cases these applications have turned out to be phony, the result of part-time employees trying to get paid for doing work they didn’t do. (Contrary to rumor, ACORN canvassers are paid by the hour, not by the application, and there are no quotas.) In these cases ACORN has been credited with catching the bad applications, firing the workers involved, and alerting election officials to the problem. The system works, and, as most election officials have recognized, ACORN is part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Partisan attacks on ACORN from those invested in maintaining the status quo of an unbalanced electorate are nothing new, and just reinforce the old saying: if they’re coming after you, you must be doing something right. We’re proud of our work to ensure that over 1.3 million traditionally underrepresented voters are heard on Election Day on issues like jobs, health care, and education.

In the *New York Times* recently [Peter Applebome](#) called ACORN’s brand of community organizing “a peculiarly American sort of activism: a job defined not by advocating for others but teaching them to advocate for themselves.” We couldn’t have said it better ourselves. At ACORN we’re listening to the voices of our neighbors and the concerns of our communities, and working to make sure that our politicians are listening too. Republicans may be dismissive of “community organizing,” but we all know that our constituencies will not be dismissed, and that when they work together they can not be ignored. We’ll keep working to make sure that their voices heard, and that this Election Day and beyond the call for change will ring out loud and clear.