



For Immediate Release: December 7,
2009

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Key Quotations from the Harshbarger Report

Key Quotations from a report released by former Massachusetts Attorney General Scott Harshbarger and the Proskauer law firm on December 7th, 2009. The independent analysis was requested by ACORN on September 21 in the wake of the video controversies.

[The controversy] erupted just as ACORN's reform leadership was about to complete an ambitious and professionally directed organizational and cultural transformation designed to revisit its mission, reshape its scope and charter, and meet squarely its legal, governance and compliance responsibilities. (pg 2)

While some of the advice and counsel given by ACORN employees and volunteers was clearly inappropriate and unprofessional, we did not find a pattern of intentional, illegal conduct by ACORN staff; in fact, there is no evidence that action, illegal or otherwise, was taken by any ACORN employee on behalf of the videographers. (pg 2 -3)

The unedited videos have never been made public. The videos that have been released appear to have been edited, in some cases substantially, including the insertion of a substitute voiceover for significant portions of Mr. O'Keefe's and Ms. Giles's comments, which makes it difficult to determine the questions to which ACORN employees are responding. A comparison of the publicly available transcripts² to the released videos confirms that large portions of the original video have been omitted from the released versions. (pg 11- 12)

The following nine (9) recommendations, discussed in detail in Section VII, are neither an epitaph nor an absolution for ACORN, but are a roadmap to reform and renewal, if implemented in their entirety in concert with other measures to regain the public's trust. (pg. 3)

ACORN's new leadership:

Since the termination of founder Wade Rathke following the disclosure of his eight-year cover-up of an embezzlement by his brother, the then Chief Executive Officer of CCI, and the

subsequent appointment of Ms. Lewis as Chief Executive Officer of ACORN in June 2008, the

national organization has pursued a significant effort to evaluate and reform its

financial and governance structures. It has retained reputable legal and financial professionals to assist in this effort, and has had the benefit of an executive consultant, on loan from a major foundation, who serves as interim Chief Operating Officer; training assistance from outside audit and training programs; and outside counsel, seconded as in-house general counsel.

It has implemented, or is implementing, the recommendations made by these consultants.

The ACORN leadership is aware of these issues, and has initiated action steps to remedy them. Organization leaders appear committed to effect reform and are on their way to preserving ACORN and its mission in a reduced size and scope. (pg 10)

ACORN's mission:

For much of the past four decades, ACORN was dedicated solely to community organizing at the city and state level. Giving priority to a “bottoms-up” approach, it determined issues of relevance to low and moderate income families, and organized those families to effect change. Organizing is ACORN’s core competency. ACORN historically has been able to recruit and retain smart, capable organizers, motivated by a desire to effect political and social change, who have run a series of successful campaigns related to a variety of issues. Despite low pay and long hours, these employees show tremendous loyalty to ACORN, and many stay for a number of years. ACORN’s organizing function has had a record of success for almost 40 years on both national and local issues, many of which are listed above.
