

## **Voter Registration Workers Unchecked**

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[http://www.abqjournal.com/cgi-bin/email\\_reporter.pl?staff=no](http://www.abqjournal.com/cgi-bin/email_reporter.pl?staff=no) *Associated Press*

An organization working to get out the vote is now conducting background checks on people it hires to register voters in New Mexico after discovering that several workers had criminal histories that ranged from forgery to identity theft.

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, or ACORN, began the background checks this week after a report earlier in the week by Albuquerque television station KRQE revealed that nine people hired to collect personal information from would-be voters did not have clean records.

Paulette Herrera, a political organizer for ACORN, told The Associated Press on Friday that the group's applications have always asked whether potential employees have been in trouble with the law.

"All these people that we had hired that did have felonies that were on the news wrote in on their applications that they did not have a felony," she said.

The nine employees have not worked for ACORN for at least a month, and Herrera said no other employees have felonies.

It is unclear how many registrations the nine workers handled; the group has registered about 60,000 voters at public places around New Mexico.

News that people with criminal records had been working for ACORN caused concern among state Republican leaders and law enforcement.

Albuquerque Police Chief Ray Schultz reviewed records of the nine workers in question.

"It's very alarming and very concerning to me," he told KRQE. "If this information is in the hands of the wrong person, it can be devastating."

Aside from the potential for misuse of a would-be voter's personal information, Scott Darnell of the Republican Party of New Mexico said the election system's integrity is at stake.

"Not only should ACORN have been doing background checks all along, we're talking about voter registration, something that is incredibly important," he said in an AP interview Friday.

"We're talking about a right, a very important right for all Americans.

"They should have never set the bar that low that they were hiring identity thieves and violent criminals to go into the community and take vital information from members of the public."

Darnell said it's important that people are not discouraged from registering to vote. He said people can also register at county clerk's offices and at political party offices.

"I want to make it incredibly clear we want people to register and vote," he said, "but we want it to be done legally and every time that an illegal vote is cast it dilutes the power of the rest of us, the power of our collective voice and vote."

Herrera said she doesn't believe that the new requirement for background checks will limit ACORN's ability to register voters as the political season heats up.

"We're just going to keep going out there real strong," she said.

This article appeared in the Albuquerque Journal:

<http://www.abqjournal.com/news/metro/09105837846newsmetro08-09-08.htm>