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Acorn Charged in Voter Registration Fraud Case in Nevada

By STEVE FRIESS

LAS VEGAS — A prominent antipoverty organization that drew criticism from Republicans during last year's presidential race was charged by Nevada officials Monday with engaging in voter registration fraud.

Two former leaders of the group's Nevada branch were also charged in connection with the submission of thousands of bogus voter registration forms.

The organization, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, or Acorn, is accused of paying canvassers only if they registered at least 20 voters per shift and providing bonuses of \$5 for registering more than 21.

Under Nevada law, it is illegal to attach incentives to such work, in part because it encourages canvassers to submit fraudulent forms, Secretary of State Ross Miller said.

Acorn submitted 91,002 completed forms in Clark County, which includes Las Vegas, of which 23,186 turned out to be valid new voters who voted in November, according to data provided by Mr. Miller's office.

Mr. Miller investigated Acorn at the behest of the Clark County registrar of voters, Larry Lomax, who noted a high number of forms turned in featuring the names of famous football players and cartoon characters.

"This is not a case of voter fraud, it's a case of voter registration fraud," Mr. Miller said. "I'm very confident that none of these fraudulent voter forms found their way into the voter registration rolls or to cast votes."

The indictment includes 13 counts each against Acorn and its former Las Vegas field director, Christopher Edwards, who is accused of creating an incentive program called "blackjack" because \$5 was paid for signing more than 21 prospective voters.

Also indicted was Acorn's former deputy regional director, Amy Busefink, on 13 counts of principle to the crime of compensation for registration of voters. Each charge carries a potential one- to four-year prison term and a \$5,000 fine.

Acorn's national spokesman, Scott Levenson, called the indictments "political grandstanding" by Mr. Miller and Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto, both Democrats.

Mr. Levenson said Acorn had fired both employees and has cooperated with investigators.

"This is in complete violation of Acorn national policy, and to indict us is a clear case of blaming the victim," Mr. Levenson said. "We had an errant employee who violated our policy and he was ordered to stop."

Neither the former employees nor Las Vegas Acorn officials could be reached for comment.

In the final month of the campaign, supporters of Senator John McCain, the Republican presidential

candidate, charged that Acorn was trying to fraudulently enroll Democratic voters likely to support Mr. McCain's opponent, Senator [Barack Obama](#).

Yet on Monday, Nevada Republicans said they doubted Acorn's activity had any impact on the outcome of the 2008 election in Nevada. Mr. Obama won the state by 12 percentage points.

"It wasn't that close," the state Republican chairwoman, Sue Lowden, said.

But Ms. Lowden added, "This is just the sort of thing that we need to be cracking down on now for a clean 2010 election."

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