



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

Cut ACORN From The State Funding Tree

JAMES L. SEWARD September 17, 2009

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New York State is facing a multi-billion dollar deficit. Families are making hard choices as they cut back during tough economic times. Certainly the last thing we should be doing is funding questionable organizations. That's why I am joining the growing call to freeze all state funds slated to go to the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), its sister organization, the New York Agency for Community Affairs (NYACA) and any other organizations that use state funds to contract with ACORN.

I am not alone in making this plea. Already the United States Senate has voted to stop federal grants and funding to ACORN and its associated organizations. The U.S. Census bureau has cut ties with the group for the 2010 census. The Brooklyn district attorney's office is investigating potential criminal activity at ACORN's New York offices. We have also been treated to several hidden-camera video reports in recent days showing blatant wrongdoing at ACORN offices.

I applaud Attorney General Cuomo for his quick response indicating he will investigate state funds earmarked for ACORN and Comptroller Dinapoli for putting a hold on state funds slated to go to the scandal ridden group. Housing fraud and voter fraud are among the claims leveled at ACORN and the possibility that our tax dollars are being misused for

potential criminal activities cannot be taken lightly.

The record spending state budget which I opposed this spring included plenty of funding for ACORN and its offshoots. \$2 million was added to the Department of State's budget for census-related work involving community outreach. It also included \$6 million for community groups to help implement the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). These funds could go to ACORN. Also, millions of dollars in federal stimulus money could be allocated by the state for ACORN, NYACA and other related groups.

With New York looking at a current deficit of over \$2 billion we need to be extremely vigilant in how we spend taxpayer dollars. Funneling money to groups with a dark cloud hanging over them must be stopped. ACORN, as well as its partner group, NYACA, are slated to receive almost half a million dollars in state funds, including grants sponsored by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and ten other members of the assembly Democrat conference, as well as grants sponsored by ten senate Democrats. The governor says he is looking for state savings to cover the growing deficit; well, this may be an opportunity to recover a few dollars.

During the most recent special senate session, legislation in support of 'green jobs' was approved. While I am in favor of the program's goal of weatherizing homes, businesses and not-for-profit organizations, I am concerned that ACORN could be involved. The bill would provide millions of dollars to community organizations to conduct job training programs related to weatherization and energy conservation projects.

Should the governor decide to sign the bill into law we need legislation to ensure that none of the money is channeled to ACORN or its related groups. I would hate to see a potentially useful program ruined by the ACORN blight. Preventative measures must be enacted at the state level to guarantee taxpayer dollars are not allocated to any of the organizations in

question.

Government sponsored programs have been known to get a bad name when waste, fraud and misuse of taxpayer money is uncovered, and rightfully so. As a state senator, one of my duties is to keep a close watch on government programs. We need to ensure that individuals and organizations that need and deserve assistance receive it and we must cut off those who do not. ACORN has shown it is among the latter.

As New York looks to improve from an economic downturn we need to be conducting business in the most honorable fashion possible. Ridding ourselves of any bad apples or rotten acorns is a step we must take.