

## Lawyers: ACORN probe could interfere with voters

WASHINGTON (AP) — Six former Justice Department lawyers want Attorney General Michael Mukasey to make sure voter registration investigations don't keep eligible minority voters from the polls on Election Day. The six attorneys formerly worked in the department's Civil Rights Division, which oversees ballot access issues as part of the Voting Rights Act.

In a letter Friday to Mukasey, the attorneys noted that Justice Department policies generally discourage voter-related investigations until after elections to make sure the inquiries don't interfere with legitimate voters at the polls.

Such policies have "long recognized that initiating federal criminal investigations into allegations of election fraud in the immediate pre-election period can have a serious chilling effect on voters, especially minority voters who have experienced a long history of discrimination and intimidation at elections," the attorneys wrote.

The FBI recently began investigating whether the community activist group ACORN has helped foster voter registration fraud around the nation in the run-up to Nov. 4. The group, which has denied any wrongdoing, says it has registered 1.3 million young people, minorities, poor and working-class voters. More than 13,000 ACORN workers in 21 states recruited low-income voters, who tend to be Democrats.

But some ACORN employees have been accused of submitting false voter registration forms — including some signed "Mickey Mouse" or other fictitious characters — to pad their pay. Workers caught submitting false information have been fired, ACORN officials say, and are being prosecuted.

The Justice Department had not received the letter as of Friday night. "The department will review the letter when it is received," said Justice spokeswoman Jamie Hais.

## GOP clerk claims Obama reminds of 'Black Hitler'

FRANKLIN, Ind. (AP) — A Republican county clerk distributed to two employees an Internet blog posting referring to Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama as a "young, Black Adolf Hitler."

Johnson County Clerk Jill Jackson said Friday that she had apologized to the employees. One had complained to police.

The employees, who had voted for Obama in the Democratic primary, discovered the printouts at their desks after returning to work from the weekend, sheriff's Deputy Doug Cox said in a police report made public this week. A surveillance video showed Jackson placing an item on one worker's desk, he said.

Jackson told The Associated Press that she was merely passing along an item that already was circulating in the office.

"There was no motive, no intent," she said. "I never intended to offend anyone."

The unsigned item does not mention Obama by name but refers to events in his life that make clear Obama is the target.

"The U.S. citizens are just not ready to give up their country to this young, Black 'Adolf Hitler' with a smile, poor direction and absolutely no experience!" it said.

Doug Lechner, Republican Party county chairman, said the incident was unacceptable and taints Jackson's ability to appear unbiased in administering this year's election.

Indiana is a swing state in this presidential election, its 11 electoral votes seen as important to Obama and to his Republican rival, John McCain. Johnson County is heavily Republican.

## Black turnout soars in early Southern polling

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Blacks are already surging to the polls in parts of the South, according to initial figures from states that encourage early voting — a striking though still preliminary sign of how strongly they will turn out nationwide for Barack Obama in his campaign to become the first African-American president.

There have been predictions all year of a record Black turnout for Obama. The first actual figures suggest that wasn't just talk:

— In North Carolina, Blacks make up 31 percent of early voters so far, even though they're just 21 percent of the population and made up only 19 percent of state's overall 2004 vote.

— Roughly 36 percent of the early voters are Black in Georgia, outpacing their 30 percent proportion of the state's population and their 25 percent share of the 2004 vote.

No one but the voters can be sure how they voted. And John McCain's campaign officials note that the Obama camp has put much more effort than they have into early voting. But the numbers are still notable.

Democrats are outvoting the GOP by a margin of 2.5-to-1 in North Carolina, where early voting has been under way for a week. That's roughly double the margin from 2004.

More than 210,000 Blacks who are registered as Democrats have cast early ballots in the Tar Heel State — compared with roughly 174,000 registered Republicans overall.

Four years ago, the number of GOP early and absentee voters was more than double that of Black Democrats.

"It's a sign about how energized African-Americans are about this election," said David Bositis, who tracks Black voting trends at the Washington-based Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

In Louisiana, more than 31 percent of the early voters are Black, and Democrats are topping Republicans nearly 2-to-1. In the crucial battleground state of Florida, nearly 55 percent of early voters are registered Democrats — well above their 41 percent share of the electorate in the Sunshine State.

Virginia, another Southern state that usually votes Republican — but where Obama is doing well in opinion polls — does not track voter registrations by race or party. But some of the largest increases in registrations this year were in Democratic-leaning cities with large minority populations.

Absentee voting — as the name suggests — was originally designed for people who couldn't make it to the polls on Election Day. But this year, more than 30 states allow any registered voter to cast an early ballot, and many election officials are encouraging voters to do so to ease the strain on Nov. 4. About a third of voters nationwide are expected to cast their ballots before Election Day.

Obama's campaign has focused heavily on turning out those voters, using advertising and campaign events. That's the message the Illinois senator brought to North Carolina during his last stop, when he addressed a predominantly Black crowd in Fayetteville.

"We want to get as many votes in as possible as early as possible," he said.

Louise Boyd, a 61-year-old Charlotte retiree, voted early this year and then returned to wait in line two days later with her sister, Nyata Frazier.

Boyd, who is Black, said she expected a very large turnout from watching rallies and noting the historic nature of voting for a Black presidential candidate.

"I had a little more pride," she said. "It shows how vastly the U.S. has changed."

The surge in Black voters follows a similar trend this year in voter registration. In the five states that track voter registration by race, Blacks signed up to vote at twice the rate of Whites in the six months through September.

The question then was would those newly registered voters turn out to vote, and now there are signs that they will. In Georgia, 230,000 more people have cast early ballots than voted absentee in 2004.

Many of those early voters have come from metro Atlanta counties, including heavily Democratic Fulton and DeKalb.

In Marietta, just north of Atlanta, poll workers were warning arriving voters of waits up to four hours on Thursday. Many were not deterred.

"Take off work, get in line and just expect a long wait," said Kristy White, 30. "Bring a book if you have to."

Georgia election officials expect 1.4 million people to vote early this year — more than double the total from four years ago.

It's the same in North Carolina, where State Board of Elections Director Gary Bartlett said two months ago he told senior staff members that mail-in and in-person early voting could reach 2 million ballots.

Bartlett said his colleagues thought he was a little crazy.

But based on results so far — more than 735,000 people had voted early as of early Thursday — "it looks like we're going to be pretty close to that."

"We're seeing historic numbers with a historic election year," Bartlett said. "I'm very proud to be a part of that historical process."

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 requires several Southern states to report racial breakdowns among voters, an effort designed to prevent discrimination.

But North Carolina, Georgia and Louisiana are the only ones reporting that information as early voting is (See Turnout, Page 9)



Sentinel-Voice photos by Marty Frierson

### M(ayor's) & M(eeting)

Las Vegas restaurateur Tim Gee of M&M Soul Food restaurant hosted a roundtable discussion on Sunday at M&M Chicken and Waffles for small business owners with Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, right center, as he explains what an Obama administration will do for them. Obama surrogates are pushing hard for him in Nevada.

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