

Nonprofits Do Work in New Mexico No One Else Is Doing

By Ona Porter

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Following the close of the 2008 legislative session, New Mexico Youth Organized and Southwest Organizing Project distributed mailers to the constituents of six legislators.

The aim of the mailers was to inform constituents about how their legislators were voting on critical issues, as well as provide information about the source of contributions their legislators were receiving from special interests. Believing this to be political campaign intervention, Secretary of State Mary Herrera acted on the advice of Attorney General Gary King and ordered the nonprofits to register as political action committees, or PACs.

A lawsuit by NMYO and SWOP disputing the claim of Herrera and King quickly followed.

Earlier this month, Judge Judith Herrera issued an important federal court decision in this closely watched case. The strongly worded opinion unambiguously favored the two Albuquerque-based nonprofit organizations. The decision put an end to a yearlong dispute over how much legal latitude Herrera and King have to force groups to register as PACs.

The ruling was a victory for the entire nonprofit sector in New Mexico.

... Forcing nonprofits to register as PACs would not only muzzle their ability to advocate on behalf of the communities they were created to serve but would also restrict the amount of money that nonprofits receive to do the work nobody else is doing - not the private sector, not the public sector. Nobody.

In order to keep their work going, nonprofits rely on donations from charitable foundations and individuals that support their missions. In addition to advancing the nonprofit missions and fostering lasting community change, those grants and contributions have a huge economic impact on our state.

In a study of just 14 nonprofits in New Mexico that was completed by the National Committee For Responsible Philanthropy late last year, the researchers documented that the total dollar amount of benefits accruing to the groups' constituencies and the broader public in the five year period studied was more than \$2.6 billion. Additionally, they found that for every dollar invested in the 14 groups for advocacy and organizing (\$16.6 million total), the groups garnered more than \$157 in benefits for New Mexico communities.

The return on investment and economic stimulus of organizing and advocacy by nonprofits in New Mexico is inarguably significant to our state's wellbeing.

[Read the full commentary](#) .

