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ACI Head Misrepresented Group's Relation to Politics

[By Katherine Campbell](#)

President, League of Women Voters of New Mexico

In a March 11 piece in the Albuquerque Journal, Beverlee McClure, president of the Association of Commerce and Industry (ACI), made several misleading statements about Better Choices New Mexico. The organizations that make up Better Choices, including the League of Women Voters of New Mexico, would like to set the record straight.

In the article, McClure was paraphrased as saying that Better Choices "helped several progressive candidates oust more conservative incumbent legislators in the 2008 elections." In this statement, McClure got two pertinent facts entirely wrong.

First, Better Choices was not even formed until August of 2009. Its first press release, which announced its formation, can be found on its Web site, betterchoicesnewmexico.com. It is dated Sept. 8, 2009.

Second, many of its member organizations are 501(c)(3) nonprofits and are prohibited by federal tax law from helping to elect or oust any candidate in any election. Others, such as the League of Women Voters of New Mexico, are nonpartisan organizations that never support or oppose either candidates or political parties.

Better Choices has not and will not engage in any electoral work. We will stick to doing what 501(c)(3)s are allowed to do under federal guidelines — educating voters, candidates and state officials about the issues and urging citizens to exercise their voting rights by going to the polls.

ACI, by contrast, plans to take an active role in the coming elections. McClure, who was speaking to the Economic Forum in the aforementioned article, was quoted as saying that ACI will back conservative and business-friendly candidates in the next election cycle. We certainly hope this doesn't mean that they will target any of the legislators who stood up for kids and working families in the last session.

McClure also claimed that Better Choices' alleged meddling in the 2008 elections was accomplished with a "free flow of out-of-state political money." Since Better Choices did not exist in 2008 it is difficult to determine what out-of-state monetary sources McClure was referring to. However, a quick glance at ACI's Web site, acinm.org, makes it clear that many of its own

supporters are from out of state. Some are even multinational. One wonders how they plan to influence New Mexico's next election.

The list of ACI supporters does offer one clue as to why ACI has always fought against making large out-of-state corporations pay taxes on the profits they make in New Mexico communities. Legislation to level the playing field for local businesses that cannot shelter their profits in other states, as big out-of-state companies can, was strongly supported by Better Choices in the recent legislative session.

Better Choices has never been coy about the issues we fight for. We believe — and many economists agree — that the state's revenue shortfall was the result of both the national recession and the 2003 New Mexico personal income tax cuts. The vast majority of those tax cuts went to the most well-off New Mexicans. The cuts were enacted, according to the governor, in an attempt to grow the state's economy. If they did grow the economy, it was not enough to shield us from the recession.

During the 2010 special session, the well-off and the out-of-state corporations should have been asked to pay their fair share. They were not, and as a result poorer New Mexicans will now pay an even more disproportionate fraction of their income in state taxes, because the tax structure was made more regressive. However, many legislators did stand up to the special interests like ACI and voted for working families, and we thank them for it.

While ACI wanted deeper cuts to education and health care, Better Choices advocated for a more balanced approach — one that doesn't make it harder for families to put food on the table; one that truly spreads the sacrifice around. We called for a reasonable, measured approach to our crisis — hardly the extremist position that McClure paints.

The members of Better Choices, including the League of Women Voters of New Mexico, know the New Mexico economy cannot thrive without its rank-and-file employees — the people who create the products we buy, process the food we eat, care for and educate our children, and perform the many other tasks that make our modern economy and way of life possible. New Mexico's children and working families did not cause this recession and they should not be expected to clean up this mess alone.