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Supporters of A.C.L.U. Call for the Ouster of Its Leaders

By **STEPHANIE STROM**
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More than 30 longtime supporters of the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) are calling for the ouster of the organization's leadership, saying it has failed to adhere to the principles it demands of others and thus jeopardized the organization's effectiveness.

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Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Anthony D. Romero, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the organization had never violated its principles.

director, and Nadine Strossen, the board president, as well as members of the executive committee.

The Web site, which was first reported in The New York Sun in June, initially will feature letters from members and donors who have joined the effort, lists of articles about the A.C.L.U. and ways for readers to join the effort.

"It's a home for A.C.L.U. loyalists who have been shut out of the organization," said Ira Glasser, who was executive director of the organization from 1978 to 2001 and has signed the statement.

Mr. Glasser emphasized that the group, conceived by Alan Kahn, a retired Wall Street executive and longtime A.C.L.U. member, was an informal one.

"We're not starting a new organization," he said. "We're a protest group, trying to get the board to exercise its fiduciary and governing responsibility in a way that it has not. We're loyal to the existing organization and above all to the principles it is intended to advance."

Emily Whitfield, an A.C.L.U. spokeswoman, defended the organization, saying it continued to fight aggressively for the principles of free speech.

"Our programs, both legal and legislative, have never been stronger," Ms. Whitfield said. "And then there's the phenomenal growth of the A.C.L.U., where we've nearly doubled staff, our revenues are higher, membership and donations are higher, and that, to us, tell

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us where we are right now, in terms of our organization. We're proud of it."

She added, "We're proud to be the leading organization fighting for freedom of speech on the Internet."

Ms. Whitfield noted that the A.C.L.U. would go to court next month to argue that federal efforts to limit access to certain content on the Web to protect children violated the free speech protection in the Constitution.

And she pointed out that other independent Web sites already reported and commented on the A.C.L.U., including acluprocon.org and stoptheaclu.com, among others.

In interviews, some members of the group behind the Web site pointed to internal controversies that have been made public, starting with an agreement that obligated the A.C.L.U. to check its staff against government lists of suspected terrorists to participate in the federal employees' annual fund-raising drive known as the Combined Federal Campaign at the same time it was criticizing the lists.

Since then, controversies have developed over other matters, including questions about the A.C.L.U.'s use of data mining to profile donors, a plan to monitor its employees' e-mail messages and efforts to control board members' access to staff and information.

Donors have confronted the organization over proposals that would have discouraged its board members from publicly criticizing the organization's policies and internal administration.

"Any one of those things by itself is unacceptable, but you could say it was an error in judgment and let it go," said David Goldberger, a law professor at [Ohio State University](http://ohio-state.edu), who defended the Nazis' right to march in Skokie, Ill., when he worked at the A.C.L.U.'s Illinois affiliate. "But when you start to see more than one of these kinds of things emerge, then it's clear that the organization's leadership has let it drift away from its core principles, and without those principles, it has no value."

The A.C.L.U. has backtracked several times in response to public criticism, withdrawing from the federal fund-raising effort, filing a lawsuit to get the requirements changed and returning some grant money, among other things.

Mr. Romero, the executive director, has apologized for "mistakes" but said the organization had never violated its principles. Controversial proposals, like the one to monitor employee e-mail, have been withdrawn for further consideration.

Members of the new group and others, however, say such issues should have never arisen.

"It does something wrong, then it retracts it after it gets bad publicity, which is no way to operate," said Anna Switzer, a longtime A.C.L.U. member from New York who said she signed onto the mission statement reluctantly. "The problem is that some of these things should never have been proposed at all."

John C. Brittain, chief counsel of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, was an A.C.L.U. board member and a member of the executive committee until he was voted out of office last month in what he and others contended was an election manipulated by the leadership. A.C.L.U. leaders denied the accusation.

"I agreed to sign on to this effort because I have been inside the A.C.L.U. for the past five years, nearly, and I've tried to address some of the concerns from within and been rebuffed," Mr. Brittain said. He said that he did not know about the opposition effort until after the election and that his support for it had nothing to do with his ouster from the board.

"I am truly troubled by the direction and governance of the organization," he said.

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