

## **Speak Now or Forever Hold Your Peace: Conflict in Advocacy Coalitions**

**Katherine E. Knutson**  
Department of Political Science  
Gustavus Adolphus College  
St. Peter, Minnesota

*Abstract:* The Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC) is an interfaith advocacy coalition representing Catholics, mainline Protestants, Jews, and Muslims in the state of Minnesota. In 2012, Minnesota voters faced the question of whether to amend the state constitution to define marriage as being between one man and one woman. The Minnesota Catholic Conference, one of the four JRLC coalition partners, was one of the primary supporters of the amendment. The Jewish Community Relations Council, another coalition partner, voted unanimously to oppose the measure. This paper examines the effects of the contentious debate over the proposed marriage amendment on this long-term coalition. I argue that long-term political coalitions can not only survive conflict, like the debate over the Minnesota marriage amendment, but may actually benefit from it.

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## **Introduction**

The Minnesota State Fair is the place to be on a humid August day; Fried bacon on a stick, life sized sculptures of dairy princesses carved from butter, and stream of political candidates and campaigns entertain more than 1.7 million visitors each year. With a vote on a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage just ten weeks after the 2012 fair, supporters and opponents of the amendment used the fair as prime campaign ground. More than 100 clergy members garnered media attention when they gathered at the gates on the opening day of the fair voicing opposition to the amendment. Inside the fairgrounds, volunteers staffed an information table for Minnesota for Marriage, an advocacy group leading the campaign in favor of the amendment.

The political battle over the constitutional amendment to define marriage not only divided state voters and but also sharply divided one long-standing political coalition: Minnesota's Joint Religious Legislative Coalition. In general terms, the debate over same-sex marriage in Minnesota pitted key religious groups against each other, with Catholics and evangelicals in strong support of the measure and Jews and mainline Protestants opposed.<sup>1</sup> This might not be a notable division except that in Minnesota many of these religious groups are part of a forty year advocacy partnership. The Joint Religious Legislative Coalition is comprised of representatives from four religious traditions: The Minnesota Catholic Conference, the Minnesota Council of Churches, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, and the Islamic Center of Minnesota. The JRLC advocates on a range of issues, all of which require full consent from all four coalition partners. Over the past forty years, the JRLC has taken action on a diverse array of topics such as gun control, campaign finance rules, health care, housing, and human trafficking.

Focusing on the role of JRLC members during the Minnesota marriage amendment campaign and identifying how the JRLC navigated this controversy provides a useful case study for exploring the ways in which coalitions function. Interest group coalitions have received increasing attention by scholars, yet many questions remain unanswered. In particular, this paper examines the ways in which long-term coalitions

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<sup>1</sup> I say "broad sense" because there were divisions within religious communities. Many Catholics opposed the measure and many mainline Protestant denominations and clergy supported it.

are able to navigate areas of disagreement. This topic is particularly understudied because most of the coalition literature is not explicit in distinguishing between short-term and long-term coalitions. One consistent finding from the literature on coalitions is that individual groups often sacrifice policy objectives and resources when they join coalitions. However, long-term coalitions may create opportunities for groups to maintain an individual identity on some key issues while still partnering on others. I argue that when long-term coalitions create a context wherein coalition partners can disagree openly over some issues, it actually serves to strengthen the strategic position of the coalition on issues for which it advocates.

This paper begins with a brief overview of the literature focused on interest group coalitions. The following two sections describe the legislative and political history of the marriage amendment, focusing first on the path the proposal took in getting to the 2012 ballot and second on the coalitions that developed to support and oppose the proposal during the campaign. I pay particular attention to the role of religious groups active in each coalition and the efforts by the coalitions to engage religious groups in the campaign. The next section focuses more specifically on the positions taken by the four members of the JRLC and on the activity of the JRLC during the campaign. The final section addresses the implications of this case in terms of coalition politics.

### **Interest Group Coalitions**

Interest group coalitions, scholars note, are increasingly common and they are perceived by many—including members of coalitions themselves—to be effective.<sup>2</sup> As Loomis argues, constitutional structure necessitates the formation of coalitions to achieve political goals. Increasing policy complexity, the growth and decentralization of government, improved communication capabilities, and the explosion of new interest groups since the 1960s, led Loomis to characterize coalitions as a “fast growing trend in

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, David Nelson and Susan Webb Yackee, “Lobbying Coalitions and Government Policy Change: An Analysis of Federal Agency Rulemaking,” *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (April 2012): 339-353; Kevin W. Hula, *Lobbying Together: Interest Group Coalitions in Legislative Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999); Burdett A. Loomis, “Coalitions of Interests: Building Bridges in the Balkanized State,” in *Interest Group Politics*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Edited by Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1986), 258-274; Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

interest group politics.”<sup>3</sup> Hula argues that coalitions make up a large part of the political landscape in Washington politics and says that “organized interests fight their major battles today largely in coalitions.”<sup>4</sup> Schlozman and Tierney found that 90% of the advocacy groups they surveyed enter into coalitions.<sup>5</sup>

Much of the literature on coalitions has focused on three key questions: why do coalitions form, what do they do, and how successful are they? Most research on coalition formation concludes that coalitions form in an effort to share resources, skills, and information.<sup>6</sup> Zwier suggests that in addition to these general benefits, religious groups have process-driven motivations; they simply value the process of cooperation with other groups.<sup>7</sup> Once formed, coalitions operate strategically in terms of how (and if) they recruit new members and what advocacy options they pursue.<sup>8</sup> Coalitions seek to add partners that will be “pivotal” in helping them achieve their political goals.<sup>9</sup>

In analyzing coalitions, many scholars make the observation that the decision to join a coalition means that a group must sacrifice some of their beliefs in order to reach a mutually agreeable position.<sup>10</sup> Holyoke argues, “...coalitions can support only one position on this outcome dimension, so lobbyists must choose to sacrifice some or all of their members’ interests if they wish to join one (unless the coalition position happens to be the position their members prefer).”<sup>11</sup> The decision to join also requires a sacrifice of scarce resources such as staff time and money as groups invest into the work of the

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<sup>3</sup> Loomis, “Coalitions of Interests,” 259.

<sup>4</sup> Hula, *Lobbying Together*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*.

<sup>6</sup> Hula, *Lobbying Together*; Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Zwier, “Coalition Strategies of Religious Interest Groups,” in *Religion and Political Behavior in the United States*. Edited by Ted G. Jelen (New York: Praeger, 1989), 171-186.

<sup>8</sup> Nelson and Yackee, “Lobbying Coalitions”; Marie Hojnacki, “Interest Groups’ Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone,” *American Journal of Political Science* 41, No. 1 (January 1997): 61-87; Marie Hojnacki, “Organized Interests’ Advocacy Behavior in Alliances,” *Political Research Quarterly* 51, no 2 (June 1998): 437-458.

<sup>9</sup> Hojnacki, “Interest Groups’ Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone”

<sup>10</sup> Thomas T. Holyoke, “Interest Group Competition and Coalition Formation,” *American Journal of Political Science* 53, No. 2 (April 2009) 360-375; Thomas T. Holyoke, *Competitive Interests: Competition and Compromise in American Interest Group Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011); Matthew Zafonte and Paul Sabatier, “Short-Term Versus Long-Term Coalitions in the Policy Process: Automotive Pollution Control, 1963-1989,” *The Policy Studies Journal* 32, No. 1 (2004): 75-107.

<sup>11</sup> Holyoke, “Interest Group Competition,” 362.

coalition.<sup>12</sup> The need to carve out a distinct identity in the saturated interest group universe, leads some groups to avoid coalition work.<sup>13</sup> As Hojnacki theorizes, "...in a crowded environment, competition for resources, support, and access to decision makers is greater. For this reason, organizations may avoid alliances with other groups in order to enhance their own reputations as advocates and to distinguish themselves from other organizations representing similar interests."<sup>14</sup>

Coalitions are often highlighted in studies of advocacy groups as a particularly effective means of advancing policy goals.<sup>15</sup> One way in which interest groups and coalitions influence political outcomes is by signaling "policymakers regarding the breadth, depth, or lack of political support for impending decisions."<sup>16</sup> Coalitions are influential because they increase the uniformity in the messages that are sent to policymakers. Nelson and Yackee further argue that larger coalitions send "louder" signals to public officials. Finally, several scholars assert that the message sent to policymakers is amplified when the coalition represents diverse voices.<sup>17</sup> Gray and Lowery theorize that a "broad alliance of interests" is more likely to gain the attention of legislators.<sup>18</sup>

Research on coalitions often focuses on short term coalitions without explicit consideration of the ways in which long-term and short-term coalitions may differ. A typology developed by Loomis helps to categorize different types of coalitions.<sup>19</sup> Loomis focuses on two variables: the longevity of the group and breadth of concern. First, coalitions may be short-term or extended. Schlozman and Tierney also discuss this factor, using the term "durability" to indicate whether a coalition is formed on an ad-hoc

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<sup>12</sup> Hojnacki, "Interest Groups' Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone"; Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "To Lobby Alone or in a Flock: Foraging Behavior among Organized Interests," *American Politics Quarterly* 26, No. 1 (1998): 5-34.

<sup>13</sup> William Browne, "Organized Interests and Their Issue Niches: A Search for Pluralism in a Policy Domain," *Journal of Politics* 52, no. 2 (May 1990): 477-509.

<sup>14</sup> Hojnacki, "Interest Groups' Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone", 62.

<sup>15</sup> Luigi Graziano, *Lobbying, Pluralism and Democracy* (London: Palgrave, 2001); Bertram J. Levine, *The Art of Lobbying: Building Trust and Selling Policy* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2009); Jeffrey M. Berry and Clyde Wilcox, *The Interest Group Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Nelson and Yackee, "Lobbying Coalitions," 342.

<sup>17</sup> Hula, *Lobbying Together*, 48; Loomis, "Coalitions of Interests," 258; Berry and Wilcox, *The Interest Group Society*, 160-162.

<sup>18</sup> Gray and Lowery, "To Lobby Alone or in a Flock," 12.

<sup>19</sup> Loomis, "Coalitions of Interests."

basis or whether it is well institutionalized.<sup>20</sup> In his survey of interest groups and coalitions, Hula finds that group leaders report that it is more difficult to form long-term coalitions than it is to form short-term coalitions.<sup>21</sup> According to Loomis, part of the reason for this is that long-term coalitions may occasionally have to avoid certain issues because of the repeated interactions that are necessary to sustain a coalition over the long term.<sup>22</sup>

Looking at the question of coalition stability through the lens of public policy theory, Zafonte and Sabatier argue that two factors promote long-term coalition stability.<sup>23</sup> The first key factor is the reciprocity that emerges through repeated interactions. They argue that, “actors pursuing relatively similar—or, at least, compatible—policy objectives...should perceive that their long-term average benefits requires maintaining fairly stable coalitions.”<sup>24</sup> This is similar to Hojnacki’s argument regarding the reputation of the individual groups. Hojnacki argues “...reputations forged from observed prior behavior become critical commodities because they reduce uncertainty and shape expectations about how groups are likely to behave as advocates in any alliance.”<sup>25</sup> In long-term coalitions, coalition partners have the opportunity to both develop positive reputations and form opinions about the dependability of other coalition partners. In addition to reciprocity, shared core values promote coalition stability. “One is more likely to choose coalition partners who espouse ideologies relatively similar to one’s own because of the increased probability of interacting, developing trust, and finding common ground with those individuals.”<sup>26</sup> The existence of shared deep core values in a long-term coalition makes it possible for a group to maintain stability in the face of disagreement.

The second key variable in the Loomis typology involves whether the coalition is focused on a single issue or on multiple issues. There is some indication that coalitions are more likely to form when a narrow interest is at stake.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the

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<sup>20</sup> Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*, 48-49.

<sup>21</sup> Hula, *Lobbying Together*, 116.

<sup>22</sup> Loomis, “Coalitions of Interests.”

<sup>23</sup> Zafonte and Sabatier, “Short-term Versus Long-Term Coalitions.”

<sup>24</sup> Zafonte and Sabatier, “Short-term Versus Long-Term Coalitions,” 78.

<sup>25</sup> Hojnacki, “Organized Interests’ Advocacy Behavior in Alliances,” 443.

<sup>26</sup> Zafonte and Sabatier, “Short-term Versus Long-Term Coalitions,” 78.

<sup>27</sup> Marie Hojnacki, “Interest Groups’ Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone,” 62.

significance of this variable is not particularly well developed in the literature because most coalition research is based on case studies of particular issues.<sup>28</sup> Loomis argues that long-term coalitions may find themselves unable to address certain issues in the interest of maintaining the partnership. While Loomis seems to suggest that this is a weakness of long-term coalitions, I argue that it may actually be one of the features that allows long-term coalitions to sustain themselves and that helps them to ultimately be more influential.

The argument developed in this paper is that the formation of a long-term coalition through the development of reciprocity (and reputation) and shared values creates a context whereby the coalition can continue to function in the face of controversial issues. A long-term coalition structure provides members with an outlet for disagreement so that they do not need to sacrifice core value positions. Furthermore, I argue that when members of a coalition disagree on highly visible issues, the strategic position of the long-term coalition is actually strengthened because it makes the coalition more diverse. The signal sent to policymakers carries more weight because the uniform message comes from a coalition perceived to be diverse.

### **The Minnesota Marriage Amendment**

When the dust settled on Tuesday, November 6, 2012, it brought to end a nearly decade-long attempt to amend the Minnesota Constitution to restrict same-sex marriage and made Minnesota the first state in the nation to reject such an amendment. In all, 51% of voters opposed the measure and another 1% left the ballot blank, which counts as a no vote in Minnesota. Within a year from the historic vote, Minnesota would become the thirteenth state to legalize same-sex marriage.<sup>29</sup>

Anyone interested in the topic of same-sex marriage knew that the nation-wide battle over same-sex marriage was heading to Minnesota. In the fifteen years leading up to the vote in Minnesota, thirty states amended their constitutions to define marriage as

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<sup>28</sup> Hula, *Lobbying Together*; Hojnacki, "Interest Groups' Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone"; Holyoke, "Interest Group Competition."

<sup>29</sup> The District of Columbia also legalized same-sex marriage before Minnesota. Of those states (and D.C.) with legal same-sex marriage, Minnesota was the 7<sup>th</sup> to do so using the legislature.

being between one man and one woman.<sup>30</sup> In this context, Minnesota was a relatively late player in the national battle over marriage. In many ways, however, the debate over same-sex marriage simply came full circle to where it began. In 1971, the Minnesota Supreme Court was the first court in the nation to rule on the question of same-sex marriage. In *Baker v. Nelson*, the Court found that Minnesota law did not allow same-sex couples to marry.<sup>31</sup> The decision was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, a position which would remain until the Court's historic turn in 2013 in the cases *Windsor v. United States* and *Hollingsworth v. Perry*.<sup>32</sup> To codify the state's position on same-sex marriage, the Minnesota legislature amended the statute dealing with marriage to include the phrase "between and man and a woman" in 1977.<sup>33</sup>

Following in the footsteps of the federal government, Minnesota passed a state Defense of Marriage act in 1997 to specifically prohibit same-sex marriages.<sup>34</sup> Concerned by the possibility that this restriction on same-sex marriages might be ruled unconstitutional by the Court, however, opponents of same-sex marriage in Minnesota began working to amend the Minnesota constitution. Opponents of same-sex marriage introduced constitutional amendments in 2004, 2006, 2007, and 2009. The House and Senate held committee hearings on many of these proposed bills, but none advanced to the full chambers for debate or a vote.

The political environment changed dramatically in 2010 when, for the first time in forty years, Republicans won control of both chambers of the Minnesota legislature.<sup>35</sup> Though the governor's office was occupied by Democrat Mark Dayton, Republican leaders knew that a constitutional amendment proposal did not require the governor's signature in order to go before the voters. All it would take to put the measure on the ballot would be a simple majority vote in both chambers of the legislature within the

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<sup>30</sup> Prior to Minnesota's defeat of the marriage amendment, only one other state (Arizona) had defeated an amendment. An attempt to ban same-sex marriages and civil unions in Arizona failed in 2006; however, the measure was reintroduced without the civil union component and was approved by voters two years later.

<sup>31</sup> 291 Minn. 310, 191 N.W.2d 185

<sup>32</sup> *Windsor v. US*, 133 S. Ct. 2884 (2013); *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, 133 S. Ct. 2652 (2013).

<sup>33</sup> SF 977, Laws of Minnesota 1977, chapter 441

<sup>34</sup> The federal Defense of Marriage act defining marriage and allowing states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states passed in 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Technically, the Republicans had never controlled both chambers of the legislature because the session in 1971 was one of last years of the legislature being officially non-partisan. The majority in both chambers caucused as "conservatives" and controlled chamber leadership.



same session. The measure would then require a majority vote from all ballots cast in the election. With Republican majorities in the House and Senate, Republican leaders were confident they could steer the proposal through both chambers successfully. The recent history of constitutional amendments also bode well for supporters of the amendment; over the past twenty years, Minnesota voters had approved nine out of ten proposed amendments.<sup>36</sup> Plus, constitutional amendments defining marriage had passed successfully in thirty other states.

Republican Representative Steve Gottwalt introduced HF 1615 on April 27, 2011. The proposal added a section to article XIII of the Minnesota Constitution to read “only a union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in Minnesota.” The proposal moved relatively quickly through the legislative committees to which it was sent. The Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee approved the bill on an 8-4 party line vote just two days after the measure was first introduced in the Senate. The full Senate passed the bill 38-27 on May 11 after nearly four hours of floor debate in which most speakers voiced opposition to the proposal. In the final vote, all but one DFL Senator voted against the measure; two other DFL senators did not vote.<sup>37</sup> All 37 Republican Senators voted in favor of the measure.

With passage of the proposal by the Senate, focus shifted to the House. The legislature was in its final days before a May 23<sup>rd</sup> adjournment. In addition to debate over the marriage amendment proposal, the legislature was also in a heated battle with Governor Dayton over a proposed budget.<sup>38</sup> At 4:00 pm on Saturday, May 21, House leaders announced that a vote on SF 1308 would be taken that night. Just the day before, a controversial pastor well known for his anti-gay stance was invited to give the opening prayer for the House, heightening tensions surrounding the vote. In the five hours of speeches given by legislators preceding the vote, DFL representatives spoke passionately against the measure, sharing personal stories of discrimination. Two Republican

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<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Dunbar, “Amending the Constitution: Easier in Minnesota?” *MPR News*, May 6, 2011, <http://www.mprnews.org/story/2011/05/06/amending-constitution-easier-in-minnesota>

<sup>37</sup> Sen. LeRoy Stumpf voted against the measure and also voted against the 2013 bill to legalize same-sex marriage; Sen. Richard “Dick” Cohen voted against the measure but did vote to legalize same-sex marriage two years later; Sen. Linda Scheid was in the end stages of a battle with cancer and passed away a few weeks later.

<sup>38</sup> Governor Dayton ended up vetoing the budget passed by the Republican-controlled legislature the day after the legislature adjourned, leading to a 20 day government shutdown.

Representatives, John Kriesel and Tim Kelly, joined DFLers in speaking against the measure. Rep. Kriesel, a military veteran who lost both legs in a roadside bombing in Iraq made an impassioned speech citing his experience in battle as a primary motivation for opposing the measure. While the mood in the chamber was quiet, protesters gathered outside and their voices could be heard in the chamber. After five hours of speeches, the House passed the bill 70-62.<sup>39</sup> Four Republicans voted against the measure, while two DFLers voted for it and two abstained.<sup>40</sup> The Minnesota Constitution does not allow for an executive veto of constitutional amendments, but Governor Dayton issued a symbolic veto of the measure on May 25.

Passage of SF 1308 in both the House and Senate marked the beginning of a nearly eighteen month campaign leading up to the November 2012 election. As in most other states, religious groups factored prominently in this campaign. However, unlike many states, religious groups in Minnesota played important roles on both sides of the debate. In reflecting on the successful campaign to defeat the marriage amendment many observers pointed to the critical and unique role faith groups played in the campaign.<sup>41</sup>

### **Marriage Amendment Campaigns**

The role of religious groups in supporting same-sex marriage bans across the country is well documented. Catholic, Mormon, and evangelical groups, in particular, have played influential roles in persuading voters to adopt constitutional bans on same-sex marriage.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in Minnesota, Catholic and evangelical groups were active supporters of the measure. However, religious groups also took an active and visible role

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<sup>39</sup> Briana Bierschbach, "House GOP Vote on Marriage Amendment Was Defining Issue of Session's Last Days" *Politics in Minnesota*, May 25, 2011, <http://politicsinminnesota.com/2011/05/house-gop-vote-on-marriage-amendment-was-defining-issue-of-session%E2%80%99s-last-days/>

<sup>40</sup> Republican Representatives Tim Kelly, Rich Murray, Steve Smith, and John Kriesel voted against the measure; DFL Representatives Denise Dittrich and Lyle Koenen voted for the measure; DFL Representative Bobby Jo Champion and David Dill did not vote.

<sup>41</sup> Eric Ringham and Sasha Aslanian, "Eighteen Months to History: How the Minnesota Marriage Amendment was Defeated—Money, Passon, Allies," *MPR News*, November 9, 2012, [www.mprnews.org](http://www.mprnews.org).

<sup>42</sup> David C. Campbell and Carin Robinson, "Religious Coalitions For and Against Gay Marriage: The Culture War Rages On," in *The Politics of Same-Sex Marriage*, ed. Craig A. Rimmerman and Clyde Wilcox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 131-154; Sean Cahill, "The Anti-Gay Marriage Movement," in *The Politics of Same-Sex Marriage*, ed. Craig A. Rimmerman and Clyde Wilcox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 155-191; Katherine Stenger, "Religiously Motivated Political Action and Same-Sex Marriage," in *Church-State Issues in America Today: Religious Convictions and Practices in Public Lives*, ed. Ann W. Duncan and Steven L. Jones (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 37-74.

in working to defeat the measure.<sup>43</sup> Jewish and Mainline Protestant groups, particularly several synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the United Church of Christ, and Unitarian Universalists, partnered with the main coalition to defeat the amendment. In this section, I describe the two primary coalition leaders involved in the campaign and highlight the role of religious groups in each coalition.

### *Minnesota for Marriage*

The advocacy group Minnesota for Marriage coordinated support for the marriage amendment. Minnesota for Marriage is affiliated with the National Organization for Marriage, a national advocacy group formed to coordinate state campaigns against same-sex marriage. Minnesota for Marriage worked closely with the National Organization for Marriage, the Minnesota Family Council (an affiliate of the national Family Research Council), and the Minnesota Catholic Conference. Of these groups, the Catholic Church took a particularly visible role in the campaign and provided a substantial portion of Minnesota for Marriage's budget through its Marriage Defense Fund and donations from Catholic groups and parishes across the country. The ties between these four organizations involved both human and financial resources.

One way in which Minnesota for Marriage was bound to its primary supporters was through personnel and leadership. There were strong ties between Minnesota for Marriage and the Minnesota Family Council. John Helmberger, the chair of Minnesota for Marriage during the campaign was also the CEO of the Minnesota Family Council. Minnesota for Marriage Communication Director Chuck Darrell was also the Director of Communication and Marketing for the Minnesota Family Council. Autumn Leva, hired as a spokesperson for Minnesota for Marriage in August 2012 was a registered lobbyist for the Minnesota Family Council. Thomas Prichard, the president of the Minnesota Family Council was a registered lobbyist for Minnesota for Marriage. Jason Adkins, the Executive Director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference (the lobbying arm of the Catholic Church in Minnesota) served as vice chair of Minnesota for Marriage.

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<sup>43</sup> As Campbell and Robinson argue, "the religious progressives who are in favor of allowing same-sex marriage are not mobilized to the degree that religious traditionalists are. They are smaller in number than the traditionalists, and either as a cause or as a consequence, they do not have an infrastructure comparable to the Christian Right's to bring their convictions into the political realm" (144).

In addition to staff ties, financial contributions linked these organizations. Minnesota for Marriage raised and spent just over \$5 million in the 2012 campaign.<sup>44</sup> About \$1 million of this was donated directly by the Minnesota Catholic Conference Marriage Defense Fund in addition to \$51,000 in in-kind donations. \$850,000 came from the Minnesota Family Council Marriage Protection Fund. The National Organization for Marriage donated \$1.9 million directly and provided just over \$167,000 in in-kind donations. In addition to contributing to Minnesota for Marriage, these partner organizations spent money directly on the campaign. In 2012, the Catholic Conference Marriage Defense Fund spent over \$230,000 directly on the campaign and the Minnesota Family Council Marriage Protection Fund spent \$338,000 on the campaign. These groups also contributed to Minnesota for Marriage in 2011, but the majority of the donations and spending came as the campaign heated up in 2012.

The campaign in support of the amendment moved quickly to mobilize a coalition of clergy and to develop a series of advertisements, most of which were available only on-line. Individuals and organizations were encouraged to sign on as supporters of Minnesota for Marriage. By the end of the campaign, 130 organizations, most of them individual churches or para-church organizations, and 530 members of the clergy were listed on the Minnesota for Marriage webpage. Minnesota for Marriage worked to mobilize clergy through conference calls of clergy, conferences sponsored by local churches, and rallies. One of the most prominent rallies organized by Minnesota for Marriage was held in front of the Minnesota Capitol in September 2012 and featured an array of clergy including Catholic Archbishop John Nienstedt; the president of the Minnesota Baptist Convention, Pastor Jerry McAfee; and Troy Dobbs, pastor of an evangelical megachurch in the Twin Cities suburbs.

In addition to these efforts to mobilize religious supporters, Minnesota for Marriage created an extensive media campaign. Working with Kalley King Yanta, a former TV news anchor in Minnesota, Minnesota for Marriage recorded 45 episodes of Minnesota Marriage Minute. Minnesota Marriage Minutes were brief (1-2 minute) webcasts structured to look like a news program. In each, Yanta would discuss a different aspect of the “marriage protection amendment” and provide arguments and

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<sup>44</sup> All campaign finance data comes from the Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board.

evidence in support of the amendment. The organization also created and aired six television advertisements narrated by Yanta.

### *Minnesotans United for All Families*

Minnesotans United for All Families emerged as the leading opponent of the proposal and brought together a coalition of forces including both GLBT groups and religious groups. Monica Meyer, the executive director of Minnesota's largest GLBT advocacy group, OutFront Minnesota, and Ann Kaner-Roth, leader of Project 515, a group working for marriage equality in Minnesota, devised plans for Minnesotans United the night the Minnesota House passed the bill to put the amendment on the ballot. By the end of the campaign, Minnesotans United raised over \$12 million in its efforts to defeat the amendment.

As the coalition formed, leaders emphasized the goal of building a nonpartisan coalition and incorporating faith groups. OutFront Minnesota hired a Faith Director for the campaign, who was assigned to work full time with Minnesotans United in January 2012. Minnesotans United hired Lutheran pastor Grant Stevensen in March of 2012 to oversee a team of five people on the campaign devoted to outreach to religious communities. The Faith Department of Minnesotans United sought to build relationships with religious groups who had already expressed opposition to the measure and to train people of faith in the primary campaign strategy.

The first religious groups to support Minnesotans United were Unitarian Universalists, the Minnesota Rabbinical Association, and the United Church of Christ. They were soon joined by several ELCA synods, independent Catholic groups, and a range of Jewish synagogues and advocacy groups. By the end of the campaign, Minnesotans United listed 120 faith communities or organizations as coalition partners. A series of press releases issued during the campaign highlighted new religious coalition partners. Minnesotans United organized over 150 clergy members to rally outside of the entrance to the Minnesota State Fair in August 2012. In the days leading up to election day, clergy also played a prominent role when 150 clergy gathered to offer a blessing over a campaign bus as it set off for a state-wide campaign tour in the final week of the campaign.

Unlike Minnesota for Marriage, whose campaign funds came primarily from three sources, Minnesotans United drew from a broad range of donors.<sup>45</sup> The largest donors included organizations such as Freedom to Marry, the Human Rights Campaign, Project 515, OutFront Minnesota, Alliance for a Better Minnesota, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and a variety of local unions. The largest donation from a religious organization was \$20,000 from the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ.<sup>46</sup> Most donations, however, were small donations from individual citizens.

Rather than focusing on arguments about discrimination and anti-gay bias, the campaign to defeat the amendment focused on engaging Minnesotans in civil dialogue. Richard Carlblom, the campaign manager for Minnesotans United, drew upon research that came out of past same-sex marriage campaigns that suggested that a successful strategy would need to counteract prejudice with personal conversations. The campaign trained volunteers to engage in conversations about same-sex marriage and to use those conversations to help voters view the proposal as unnecessary and hurtful to their gay and lesbian friends and neighbors.

The Faith Department followed the lead of the campaign, focusing primarily on conversations with people of faith. One member of the Faith Department said, “The biggest thing we were doing was training people of faith to have conversations about marriage from a faith perspective.”<sup>47</sup> The goal was to build teams of people within congregations who would be trained in having conversations about marriage from a faith perspective. The religious network was especially strong within Jewish communities and within some segments of the Mainline Protestant community (ELCA Lutherans, United Church of Christ, and Presbyterians, in particular). Perhaps surprisingly, Catholics were also a main source of support. Two of the five members of the Faith Department were devoted to building teams in Catholic parishes. “The level of excitement among Catholics was high because it all needed to be happening underground. They felt very subversive and it felt exciting.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Campaign finance documents filed at the end of October listed 634 separate donations to Minnesota for Marriage and 9,557 separate donations to Minnesotans United.

<sup>46</sup> The Minnesota United Church of Christ is a member of the Minnesota Council of Churches.

<sup>47</sup> Javen Swanson, telephone interview with author, February 13, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Swanson, telephone interview with author.

The focus on personal relationships and dialogue carried over into the group's media campaign, which featured Minnesota voters from around the state describing the reasons why they planned to vote no. The campaign was careful to create commercials targeted to key voting blocs such as Republicans, suburban families, and people living in Minnesota's northern Iron Range.

### **JRLC Activity in the Marriage Amendment Campaign**

The JRLC formed in 1971 to be a voice for religious institutions and citizens in the state of Minnesota. The most fundamental ground rule of the JRLC is that the group advocates only on issues to which all four coalition partners agree. Position papers are carefully constructed and vetted by the boards of directors of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, the Minnesota Council of Churches, the Jewish Community Relations Council, and the Islamic Center of Minnesota. Over the years, JRLC board members have learned to focus on the issues where common ground can be reached and avoid issues they know will be divisive.

It is safe to say the debate over the marriage amendment was one of the most divisive political issues to emerge in the group's forty year history. Individual citizens from all four of the JRLC coalition partners participated in the marriage amendment campaign. Two of the coalition partners (the Catholic Conference and the Jewish Community Relations Council) took official positions on the issue and devoted considerable group resources to the campaign. The other two coalition partners (the Council of Churches and the Islamic Center) declined to take an official position on the amendment, but were still involved in the public debate. This section examines the stance taken by each of the four coalition partners and details their involvement in the marriage amendment campaign.

#### *Catholic Conference*

The Minnesota Catholic Conference was one of the two original member organizations of the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition. It was formed in 1967 by the Catholic Bishops of Minnesota to serve as an institutional vehicle by which the bishops of Minnesota could address the economic and spiritual needs of Minnesotans. The

Catholic Church reports over 1.5 million Catholics in Minnesota and the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that 28% of Minnesotans identify as Catholic.<sup>49</sup>

The Catholic Conference, under the leadership of Archbishop John Nienstedt, played a major role in the unsuccessful effort to pass the marriage amendment. In the end, the Catholic Church spent well over a million dollars and funded nearly one-fourth of the campaign in favor of the amendment. Archbishop John Nienstedt was intimately involved in the campaign and used all of the tools at his disposal to mobilize Catholics. Nienstedt's opposition to same-sex marriage was nothing new. In 2006, while serving as Bishop of the diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota, Nienstedt mobilized area Catholics to send postcards to lawmakers in support of a proposed constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. In 2010, when discussion about a marriage amendment reemerged, Nienstedt, in his new role as Archbishop, distributed a video message to 400,000 Minnesota Catholics. The video, released six weeks before the election, featured a six-minute introduction by Nienstedt in which he argued, "The archdiocese believes that the time has come for voters to be presented directly with an amendment to our state constitution to preserve our historic understanding of marriage...In fact, this is the only way to put the one man one woman definition of marriage beyond the reach of the courts and politicians."<sup>50</sup> In the subsequent election, Republicans won control of both chambers of the legislature.

Nienstedt continued to throw the weight of the Catholic Conference behind efforts to put a marriage amendment on the ballot, devoting staff resources to the campaign, helping to mobilize non-Catholic clergy, encouraging parish priests to talk about the issue and use a "marriage prayer" in the liturgy, and communicating messages directly to Minnesota Catholics. In September 2012, the Catholic Conference spent approximately \$100,000 on a mailing to 400,000 Catholic households asking for support of the

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<sup>49</sup> Pew Center for People and the Press, *Minnesota*, February 2008, <http://www.pewforum.org/religion08/states/minnesota/>.

<sup>50</sup> Sasha Aslanian, "The Deep Roots of the Marriage Debate," *MPR News*, October 25, 2012.



amendment and financial donations to the campaign.<sup>51</sup> And, of course, the Catholic Conference worked closely with Minnesota for Marriage throughout the campaign.

This is not to say that all Catholics supported the measure; there were significant pockets of Catholic opponents to the marriage amendment. Small groups of retired priests voiced opposition to the amendment, as did many lay Catholics who affiliated with the group Catholics for Marriage Equality MN or who worked directly with Minnesotans United for All Families.<sup>52</sup>

### *Council of Churches*

The Minnesota Council of Churches was the second original member of the JRLC. It formed in 1947 through a merger of four organizations representing mainline Protestant churches in Minnesota: the Minnesota Council of Religious Education, the Minnesota Federation of Churches, the Minnesota Council of Church Women, and the Minnesota School of Missions. The Council of Churches currently represents 24 governing bodies from fifteen different denominations. The Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life found that 32% of Minnesotans identify with a mainline Protestant denomination, like those represented by the Council of Churches.<sup>53</sup> This is significantly higher than the national average of 18%, reflecting the strong presence of Lutheran Churches in Minnesota.

The Council of Churches was one of the two JRLC coalition partners that did not take an official position on the issue; the Council's own members were so divided that there was no possibility of reaching agreement within the group. However, Minnesotans United counted many Council-affiliated congregations and denominational bodies among its coalition partners. Several ELCA (Lutheran) synods voted to oppose the marriage amendment and join Minnesotans United as did Episcopal, Congregational, Presbyterian, and United Methodist churches. At the same time, churches and pastors from the Church

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<sup>51</sup> Doug Belden, "Veterans Organize Against Ban; Catholic Church Seeks Donations," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 24, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Sasha Aslanian, "Some Minn. Priests Differ with Catholic Church Over Marriage Amendment," *MPR News*, May 17, 2012. See also [www.c4me.org](http://www.c4me.org). An interesting side note is that one of the most outspoken ex-priests was Ed Flahavan who helped found the JRLC in 1971.

<sup>53</sup> Pew Center for People and the Press, "Minnesota."

of God in Christ and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese joined with Minnesota for Marriage in publically campaigning for the amendment.

Though the Council did not take a formal stand on the marriage amendment, they did participate in the public dialogue leading up to the vote. Beginning in June 2012, the Council launched the Respectful Conversations Project centered on the topic of the marriage amendment.<sup>54</sup> Trained facilitators led discussions in churches around Minnesota. According to the Council, the group "...saw the need to create safe spaces for people to talk with those with differing viewpoints in order to create empathy and understanding while maintaining and even enhancing relationships."<sup>55</sup> Over the course of the campaign, 55 conversations were held with over 1,500 participants. Participants would enjoy dinner served family style, watch an informational video about the proposed amendment, and participate in several rounds of structured and timed discussion in which all participants would speak. While "it was not the intention of the Respectful Conversations Project to influence the outcome of the election..." the structure of the conversations was very similar to the primary strategy employed by Minnesotans United.<sup>56</sup> Assessment of the project found that a majority of participants reported opposing the amendment and, in many ways, the conversations seemed simply to reinforce existing beliefs among participants.

### *Jewish Community Relations Council*

Within weeks of the announcement of the newly-formed JRLC in 1971, Jewish community leaders approached the group and asked to join. At first, the Jewish community was represented through the Minnesota Rabbinical Association, but within a few years, the Jewish Community Relations Council replaced the MRA on the JRLC board. The Jewish Community Relations Council, formed in 1939, grew out of the Minnesota Jewish Council to represent the growing Jewish population in Minnesota. Today, the JCRC is a voice of political advocacy for the Jewish community in Minnesota and it works closely with other prominent organizations such as the Minnesota

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.bushfoundation.org/community-innovation/past-innovation-projects/respectful-conversations-project>.

<sup>55</sup> Minnesota Council of Churches, "Final Report: Softening Hearts, Not Changing Minds," 2012, [http://issuu.com/mnchurches/docs/rcp\\_final\\_published\\_report\\_4.22](http://issuu.com/mnchurches/docs/rcp_final_published_report_4.22)

<sup>56</sup> Minnesota Council of Churches, "Final Report."

Rabbinical Association and Jewish Community Action. Estimates put the Jewish population in Minnesota at around 45,000 people, making up less than 1% of the total population.<sup>57</sup>

The JCRC board voted unanimously on October 18, 2012 to oppose the marriage amendment; however the group was already involved with the campaign before that point. The JCRC co-sponsored an event in March focused on defeating the marriage amendment. One JCRC board member, Leah Solo, also served on the Minnesotans United board and helped to coordinate outreach to the Jewish community. In all, ten different Jewish congregations joined Minnesotans United as coalition partners, as did several other Jewish advocacy groups.

### *Islamic Center*

The Islamic Center is the most recent addition to the JRLC. Muslim leaders approached the JRLC in 1995 seeking participation in the group and soon the American Muslim Council—Minnesota Chapter was added to the coalition as an “observer.” In 2004, one of the representatives from the AMC-MC on the JRLC board helped to shift membership from the AMC-MC to the Islamic Center, and the Islamic Center was added as a full coalition partner to the JRLC. The Islamic Center, founded in 1969, seeks to be a center of religious and social life for new Muslim immigrants to Minnesota.<sup>58</sup> Estimates of the size of the Muslim population in Minnesota range from 20,000-130,000.<sup>59</sup>

Like the Minnesota Council of Churches, the Islamic Center declined to take a position on the Minnesota Marriage Amendment; however their silence on the issue was a bit more surprising. In 2009, the group joined with the Minnesota Family Council, the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, and Orthodox Jews in a press conference urging the Minnesota legislature to pass a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage. Three separate constitutional amendment proposals were introduced in the

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<sup>57</sup> “Jewish Population in the United States, 2012,” in *American Jewish Year Book*, eds. Ira M. Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 143-211; Pew Center for People and the Press, “Minnesota.”

<sup>58</sup> In 1988, the Islamic Center opened a community center and in the 1990s it added a school.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Woessner, “Size of Twin Cities Muslim Population Difficult to Determine,” Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, August 2002.

House the day after the press conference, but none gained traction. Given their documented support for a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, it is surprising that the Islamic Center did not take a formal position during the 2012 campaign.

Activists on both sides of the debate actively sought support from Muslim communities. Minnesota for Marriage conducted outreach to some of the largest mosques in Minneapolis and reported “getting good support from...members of these mosques and also the imams.”<sup>60</sup> Minnesotans United also tried to mobilize the Muslim community. The group hired a liaison to the Somali community (Somalis make up one of the largest blocs of Muslims in Minnesota) and approached them as an ethnic group rather than as a religious group. One of the faith organizers for Minnesotans United described the group’s outreach to Muslims as “a place where we really failed.”<sup>61</sup>

Though the Islamic Center previously endorsed a constitutional amendment, they remained silent during the 2012 campaign. In fact, no mosques or imams were listed as supporters of either Minnesota for Marriage or Minnesotans United. One possible reason that was raised in off-the-record interviews was that, though same-sex marriage violates traditional Muslim teachings, the Islamic Center did not want to strain relations with DFL leaders over the issue and so they chose to remain neutral.

### *The JRLC*

With one coalition partner in strong support, one strongly opposed, and two without a formal position, the JRLC was unable to take a formal position on the issue. However, even in the midst of a heated campaign battle, the rest of the JRLC’s work continued as usual. Board members reported that during the campaign, the JRLC board seemed to ignore the fact that it was happening. Everyone was aware that the coalition was split and no one felt the need to try to find common ground on such a contentious issue. As one board member said, “everyone in the room knew that to talk about it would be unproductive.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> As quoted in “Gay Marriage Divides Minnesota Muslims,” OnIslam.net, September 9, 2012, <http://www.onislam.net/english/news/americas/458954-gay-marriage-divides-minnesota-muslims.html>; “Proposed Gay Marriage Amendment Forces Somali Immigrants to Confront Taboo,” *Public Radio International*, July 20, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Swanson, Interview.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with author, August, 15, 2013.

On one hand, the JRLC's avoidance of the issue during the campaign may be viewed as a form of passive aggressive aversion. However, interview data reveals no evidence of passive-aggressive behavior.<sup>63</sup> Rather, avoiding the issue reveals an intentional effort to maintain relationships. For example, when asked if the issue was an "elephant in the room," one board member said she didn't view it that way at all. "We didn't even discuss it...it was understood that we didn't agree on it, so it didn't come up. That's where interfaith coalitions get in trouble...when they try to tackle issues on which they disagree."<sup>64</sup>

No board members interviewed for this project viewed the disagreement over the amendment as a major source of tension for the group. "We know how to not do something...we've been avoiding the abortion issue since our founding," said one staff member.<sup>65</sup> One leader described it as "not a big issue" in terms of relationships among board members and said, if anything, it helped build respect among board members from different groups. The same board member said, "people really respected us on that issue because our advocacy was honorable...we took a tough position and got hammered on it."<sup>66</sup>

## **Discussion**

At first glance the experience of the JRLC certainly supports Loomis' observation that long-term coalitions are unable to address certain issues. Rather than viewing this as a weakness of the coalition, though, I argue that it may in fact represent a strength of the coalition. Two questions emerge from this conflict. First, why didn't the coalition crumble as a result of this conflict? What is it about this long-term coalition that allows it to survive an experience like this in which coalition partners find themselves on opposite ends of a highly salient political battle? Secondly, what happened to the coalition as a result of this? Does the presence of conflict weaken or strengthen the coalition? The tendency is to view this as a situation where the coalition was weakened because of

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<sup>63</sup> The Mayo Clinic lists resentment, procrastination, and cynical, sullen, or hostile attitudes as some signs of passive aggressive behavior. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/adult-health/expert-answers/passive-aggressive-behavior/faq-20057901>

<sup>64</sup> Interview with author, July 8, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with author, June 12, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with author, August 14, 2013.

vehement and public disagreement between two usual allies. I argue that the JRLC actually benefits from occasional controversial issues like the marriage amendment.

### *Surviving Conflict*

Starting with the first question, it is important to explore how this coalition survived a situation of conflict. The answer, for this group, lies in the organization's structure developed over time and the existence of interpersonal relationships. The JRLC's model of setting aside areas of difference to focus on areas of common ground has effectively kept the coalition together and functioning for over forty years. Organizationally, leaders of the coalition have agreed to advocate on only those issues to which all four coalition members can agree. Issues may be proposed or researched through the formation of a task force, but the coalition only moves forward when there is consensus. This does not stop the group from exploring topics where there may be disagreement, but it does create a recognizable boundary to action. Representatives from the participating coalition partners know that they retain ultimate veto power over any actions the group takes, which provides a sense of security during discussion of controversial topics.

In addition to organizational ground rules that help maintain the coalition, the interpersonal relationships developed among leaders from the four faith traditions help the coalition survive periods of intense conflict. Board members of the JRLC find that one of the most important outcomes from their work in coalition has been the building of personal relationships among leaders from different groups.<sup>67</sup> Those preexisting relationships facilitate conversations and actions when challenging situations arise at later times. The social capital that develops through work in the coalition carries over into future efforts at problem-solving. The impact of norms of trust and reciprocity is evident in this case as board members expressed support for leaders from faith traditions who were on opposite sides of the political battle.

This type of relationship-building may be expected in long-term coalitions as participants have opportunities for repeated interactions. However, the benefits of

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<sup>67</sup> Katherine Knutson, *Interfaith Advocacy: The Role of Religious Coalitions in the Political Process*, (New York: Routledge, 2013): 133.

interpersonal relationships can also accrue in short-term coalitions. For example, Minnesotans United for All Families also relied upon a coalition model. Minnesotans United deliberately brought together Democrats, Republicans, and Independents to work toward marriage equality. Richard Carlbom, the campaign manager for Minnesotans United reflected on the ability of the campaign to unite around a shared goal.

“...When it was clear that the political director and communications director for Tom Emmer and Norm Coleman were willing to work with us and help us strategize how to beat this—I mean, these are guys [Republican political operatives involved in Minnesotans United included Jake Loesch, Carl Kuhl and Patrick Connelly], in 2010, when I worked for Time Walz, I despised them. They disgusted me. I didn’t know them, I’d never met them, but I could not stand them as a political operative...And now, looking forward to 2013, 2014...they’re going to go and do everything they can to beat Mark Dayton and Al Franken. And I will be a steadfast supporter and do whatever I can to get them re-elected. At the end of the day, I can say, let’s go get coffee. Let’s go sit down and talk about things.”<sup>68</sup>

The benefit of these types of relationships across party lines stood out to Grant Stevensen, the Lutheran pastor who served as faith director for Minnesotans United. In reflecting on the campaign Stevensen said, “my fantasy is that this isn’t just about the marriage amendment. I think it’s a new way to do politics.”<sup>69</sup>

Sabatier, Hunter and McLaughlin argue that members of opposing advocacy coalitions often “perceive opponents to be stronger and more ‘evil’ than they actually are.”<sup>70</sup> They term this the “devil shift” and provide empirical evidence coupled with arguments from psychological research to support this observation. Political actors, they argue, “start with the assumption that they are right-thinking, virtuous, and fair in their judgments.”<sup>71</sup> Political actors motivated by religious belief may be especially susceptible to this because many also believe that they are acting in the interest of God, making their opponents into opponents of God. This type of thinking is on full display in contemporary American politics, characterized by ideological polarization and political

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<sup>68</sup> Ringham and Aslanian, “Eighteen Months to History.”

<sup>69</sup> Ringham and Aslanian, “Eighteen Months to History.”

<sup>70</sup> Paul Sabatier, Susan Hunter, and Susan McLaughlin, “The Devil Shift: Perceptions and Misperceptions of Opponents,” *Western Political Quarterly* 40, No. 3 (September 1987): 450.

<sup>71</sup> Sabatier, Hunter, and McLaughlin, “The Devil Shift,” 452.

gridlock. “Acute partisan conflict arising from the ideological polarization of the national parties is now a dominant feature of American politics,” argues Jacobson.<sup>72</sup>

The debate over same-sex marriage falls clearly into the category of “culture wars” first described by Hunter and so this case is a place where we might expect to see the devil shift in action.<sup>73</sup> While actors on both sides of the debate certainly displayed examples of this type of thinking, the preexisting relationships among board members of the JRLC and basic organizational ground rules allowed individuals from both sides of the debate to maintain a strong and cordial relationship in the midst of the campaign. Similarly, members of the Minnesotans United campaign were able to develop strong relationships with those from other parties even in the midst of an election year because of their participation in the coalition.

Coalitions rely on a strong set of organizational ground rules and the development interpersonal relationships to survive periods of conflict. Long-term coalitions are especially well suited to this because they facilitate repeated interactions among coalition partners. While these types of relationships will not singlehandedly solve the problems of polarization and gridlock, they offer a glimmer of hope; It is possible to disagree but not demonize.

### *The Aftermath of Conflict*

Assuming that a coalition can survive a period of conflict, what happens next? I argue that rather than weakening the coalition’s position, the conflict actually serves to strengthen it. Additionally, I argue, the conflict strengthens not only the coalition but also the individual coalition participants.

Coalitions are influential because they increase the uniformity in the messages that are sent to policymakers.<sup>74</sup> Diverse coalitions are especially powerful because they signal to decision-makers that a position is broadly supported (or opposed) and because coalition partners are able to take the message to different constituencies with whom they

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<sup>72</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, “Partisan Polarization in American Politics: A Background Paper,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, No. 4 (December 2013): 688-708, 688.

<sup>73</sup> James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>74</sup> Nelson and Yackee, “Lobbying Coalitions,” 342.



have existing relationships. The adage “politics makes strange bedfellows” captures the important role coalitions play in bridging significant political gaps.

When the JRLC began in 1971, it benefitted from what one early leader called the “curiosity factor.”<sup>75</sup> Catholics, Protestants, and Jews did not have a history of working together in American politics and so the coalition drew power from the fact that such different groups could come together on an issue. Over the past forty years, both interfaith work and religious group participation in political debates have become more common. These changes make it increasingly difficult for a group like the JRLC to gain attention in a political environment saturated by advocacy group participation. This is especially true when the JRLC begins to look like just another coalition of left-wing voices calling out for liberal solutions to public problems. In fact, the JRLC has long battled the public perception that they are overly partisan and too closely aligned with the DFL.<sup>76</sup>

Creating an operating framework that allows dissention, as the JRLC has done, allows individual coalition partners to stake out divergent positions that, I argue, actually strengthens the JRLC’s advocacy position on other issues. Hula describes this process in his study of national advocacy coalitions. “Differentiation in the political arena can generate political capital that groups can bring with them into the policy arena where their terminal goals lie. Indeed, developing a strong identity in the political arena may make a group a more desirable coalition partner in the policy arena.”<sup>77</sup> The JRLC benefits when the JCRC and the Catholic Conference stake out strongly opposing positions on same-sex marriage (or abortion) because when the JRLC then unites on other issues, it creates more legitimacy in the eyes of legislators. The JRLC really can claim to represent four different groups, rather than simply representing four groups with identical policy preferences. In short, the presence of controversy helps restore the JRLC’s “curiosity factor.” The diversity of the coalition sends an important message to policymakers when it does choose to speak with one voice. The key to this involves forming a strong long-term coalition in which participants grow to trust and respect one another through repeated interactions.

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<sup>75</sup> Patrick Marx, Interview with author, July 25, 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Knutson, *Interfaith Advocacy*, 110-111.

<sup>77</sup> Hula, *Lobbying Together*, 127.

In addition to the JRLC benefitting from divisive issues like the marriage amendment, there is reason to suspect that individual coalition partners may also benefit. Browne observes, “Issue niches are, in effect, necessary for organizations as lobbyists and other interest representatives differentiate one from the other in competition for policymakers’ support.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly Hula argues, “the desire to join a coalition is tempered by the need for groups to differentiate themselves from one another and to develop independent reputations as significant and legitimate voices in their own right.”<sup>79</sup> Without careful attention to their individual reputation, coalition partners risk being overshadowed by the coalition.

Several of the individual coalition partners making up the JRLC face competition from other groups representing members of their religious community. For example, Jews in Minnesota may look to Jewish Community Action or the Minnesota Rabbinical Council in addition to the JCRC as a source of policy leadership. Similarly, Catholics can turn to groups such as Catholic Charities or Catholics for Marriage Equality in addition to (or instead of) the Catholic Conference. These JRLC coalition partners have a particular interest in ensuring their own relevancy and distinguishing themselves from competitors. The opportunity to stake out clear positions on highly salient issues helps groups to differentiate themselves from other groups. This can help individual groups develop more internal cohesion, mobilize members, and ensure their continued existence.<sup>80</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Minnesota voters made history in November 2012 when they became the first in the nation to reject a proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage. In the process, religious groups moved to the forefront of the political debate, playing major roles in both sides of the campaign. This issue, with all its controversy and conflict, is a perfect opportunity for exploring how coalitions maintain themselves in the midst of political conflict. While coalition partnership often requires a sacrifice on the part of individual groups, a long term coalition can create opportunities for disagreement and

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<sup>78</sup> Browne, “Organized Interests and their Issue Niches,” 477.

<sup>79</sup> Hula, *Lobbying Together*, 126.

<sup>80</sup> Sabatier, Hunter, and McLaughlin, “The Devil Shift,” 453.

dissent without sacrificing the stability of the coalition. In fact, a long-term coalition that lets members have an outlet on some issues actually may increase the political capital of the group. I argue that the disagreement expressed on the marriage amendment did not reflect weakness in the coalition and, if anything, actually serves to strengthen the coalition and the individual coalition partners.

This paper explores the ways in which one long-term coalition navigated the rocky waters of political conflict. It adds to the literature on coalition politics by focusing on the internal dynamics of long-term coalitions, however, it represents only a single case. More research is needed to see if other long-term coalitions behave in a similar manner and experience similar effects. Future research should carefully consider the differences between long-term and short-term coalitions and should examine the extent to which the diversity of a coalition impacts coalition dynamics and success.