



The Faithful Divide Over Wedding Vows

A Profile of Michigan's 2004 Battle Over Marriage Equality

Jonathan Duffy and Sally Steenland May 2009



The Faithful Divide Over Wedding Vows

A Profile of Michigan's 2004 Battle Over Marriage Equality

Jonathan Duffy and Sally Steenland May 2009

Introduction and summary

On November 2, 2004, voters in Michigan approved a state constitutional amendment that prohibited same-sex marriage. The amendment, known as Proposal 2, passed with nearly 60- percent support and came after vigorous efforts by advocacy groups and faith communities on both sides of the issue.

Supporters of Proposal 2 raised more money and waged a stronger campaign than their opponents. Proposal 2 supporters also relied heavily on religious arguments, while their opponents tended to frame their arguments mainly in secular terms, such as issues of civil rights and social justice. Supporters also launched a late barrage of spending, mailings, and sermons. Their efforts were successful, and the proposal passed. Exit polls showed that religion played a significant role in the outcome.

Since 2004, there have been several consequences to passage of Proposal 2. One has been the denial of health care benefits to same-sex partners in civil unions. Although Proposal 2 supporters claimed the proposal was limited to marriage and would not take away health benefits, in fact it did.

A review of the battle over Proposal 2, the alliances it shaped, and the efforts and tactics involved not only provides insights into the ballot-initiative process, but, more importantly, may help illuminate similar campaigns in the future. The arguments, organizing strategies, and communications messages that worked, or didn't work, for Proposal 2 in Michigan can serve as lessons in future struggles. This paper will explore those strategies so that progressives in Michigan and other states can learn from the experiences in this battleground over marriage equality.

Center for American Progress



About the Center for American Progress

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values.

We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”



About the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative

A project of the Center for American Progress, the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative works to identify and articulate the moral, ethical, and spiritual values underpinning policy issues, to shape a progressive stance in which these values are clear, and to increase public awareness and understanding of these values.

The Initiative also works to safeguard the healthy separation of church and state that has allowed religion in our country to flourish. In all its efforts, the Initiative works for a society and government that strengthen the common good and respect the basic dignity of all people.