



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY

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Open letter to our friends and partners:

On the ballot in November, Minnesotans will be faced with two constitutional amendments: one set to ban people of the same sex from marrying and the other set to prevent citizens without a government-issued ID from voting.

IATP stands squarely against the two proposed amendments. It is unusual for us to take a position on matters outside our primary arenas of work, but we feel the threat to our state, and to democracy itself, is such that we cannot remain silent. We hope you and your organizations will consider taking a stand on this issue as well.

We oppose the amendments not only because we consider them to be unjust and discriminatory, but, even more fundamentally, because governing by constitutional amendment is bad policy and allows powerful outside interests to undo our constitutional rights.

Join us in opposing unjust and discriminatory amendments

IATP opposes both these amendments on the merits. We believe that respect for human rights means fairness for all people in all our laws, including marriage laws. Minnesota has a proud history of being a progressive, fair state, and a national leader on civil rights, voting rights and good government. Singling out one group of people for whom marriage is off limits is unjust and discriminatory. Similarly, the proposed voter-ID requirement would be discriminatory, effectively depriving many rural citizens, young people, poor people, military personnel serving abroad and recent arrivals of their right to vote. As the state leading the nation in voter turnout in the last eight elections (77.8 percent of eligible voters turned out in 2008), why would we want to start making it more difficult for people to vote? We should be proud of our record, and do whatever we can to protect and improve it. Passing either of these amendments would be a sad step backward for Minnesota.

Protect our constitution and our legislature

People have differing personal views on gay marriage and requiring government identification in order to vote. Regardless of the issue, this tactic is extremely troubling. We believe that Minnesotans of all political stripes take pride in good government, and care deeply that Minnesota voters aren't the unknowing victims of outside agendas. Legislating by constitutional amendment is not the way to govern. No matter your personal opinions about gay marriage or voter ID, we urge you to vote against reckless constitutional amendments.

Our constitutions, both federal and state, are different from our laws. They are the broad framework within which we make, interpret and enforce our laws, and protect ourselves from government unfairness or excesses. Particular laws come and go, changing with the times, but a constitution endures, as a foundation. IATP recognizes the important historical protection

provided by constitutional amendments to establish and protect the rights of minorities and expand democratic participation.

Today, however, in an era of unlimited spending by billionaires and millionaires, the tables have been turned. It is easier for powerful corporate interests to fund constitutional amendment campaigns to rewrite the laws of a state than it would be to convince the electorate to choose candidates who will do their bidding. Governing by constitutional amendments poses the dual threat of making bad law and creating a situation that would require another constitutional amendment to overturn, a nightmare scenario that has helped bring the state of California to its knees. The process in Minnesota is even more precarious because referendums on amending the constitution require only a simple majority vote rather than the two-thirds majority required in many states.

It is bad enough that Minnesotans have to experience this reckless style of lawmaking, but the fact is, it's happening across the country, and not surprisingly, many of these amendments have the same exact wording because they have been crafted by the same exact people—the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC has been stealthily writing and rewriting the legislative agenda of the U.S. for over 30 years. Who pays to have ALEC rewrite state constitutions and draft model legislation? Some of the nation's largest corporations and wealthy individuals. In their own words, ALEC provides corporations “a voice and a vote.” From the ultra-conservative Koch brothers, to the tobacco giant Altria/Phillip Morris; the 300 dues-paying corporations are hell-bent on not paying taxes, limiting democratic participation and destroying any regulatory role of government. This is what is controlling our legislative agenda. This is not Minnesota.

IATP will work to defeat both the same-sex marriage amendment and the voter-ID amendment to Minnesota's constitution. We believe this is necessary to preserve democracy and to prevent corporate control of our state laws. We invite you to join us.

Sincerely,

Jim Harkness
President
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy