



Brett Buckner of OneMN.org, and Bruce Corrie of Concordia University, St. Paul

Engage and empower all Minnesotans to create an open,
welcoming, inclusive state

A Civic Caucus Review of Minnesota's Public Policy Process Interview

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Present

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Summary

More and more people are talking about the need for "One Minnesota," according to Concordia University, Saint Paul, Economics Professor Bruce Corrie and OneMN.org Managing Director Brett Buckner. They say creating "One Minnesota" is the goal of the organization OneMN.org. Its mission is to engage and empower Minnesotans to establish mutual prosperity and a shared vision of racial equity and social and economic inclusion.

Corrie discusses the organization's involvement in Minnesota's 2000 and 2010 redistricting debates, representing the voice of what Corrie calls the ALANA (African and African American, Latino, AAsian and Native American) populations. He points to several economic models that can and are being used in Minnesota as alternatives to a strict free-market perspective. He laments the poor state of K-12 math and science education in the state, which he says is being ignored by the Legislature.

Buckner comments on the "browning" of Minnesota, especially in the southern and western parts of the state, and says immigrants from across the globe have saved many towns in Greater Minnesota,

although that is not recognized either in county seats or at the Legislature. He says that we must include all Minnesotans in conversations about public policy and in the process of making public policy. That's the way to assure that everyone is part of an open, welcome, inclusive society.

Buckner believes we need to make issues relevant to people and engage or re-engage them by walking them through the process of making change and letting them know that they themselves might have the solutions to urgent community problems. He offers as an example the small learning communities Common Cause Minnesota is developing around the state.

Biographies

Brett Buckner is managing director of OneMN.org, a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to Minnesota's racial, social, and economic equity and inclusion. Since 2010, he has also been the principal of Base, Network, & Power, a consulting group dedicated to advancing political engagement for the African, African American, Latino, Asian and Native American (ALANA) communities. He has also worked for Congressman Keith Ellison (D-Minneapolis), the Minnesota State DFL and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Buckner serves as chair of the Minnesota Common Cause advisory board and as a member of the Metropolitan Independent Business Association Public Policy Committee. From 1999 to 2003, he served as a vice president of the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP and as its president from 2003 to 2004. He received the NAACP Region IV Man of the Year award in 2007.


A graduate of North Community High School in Minneapolis, Buckner attended Hampton University in Virginia and earned a B.A. from Metropolitan State University in individualized studies: "Equity, Engagement and Empowerment in the 21st Century." He received his M.A. degree from Metro State's Advocacy & Political Leadership program. In 2014, he was a Roy Wilkins Racial and Social Policy Community Fellow.

Bruce Corrie is associate vice president for university relations and international programs and professor of economics at Concordia University, Saint Paul. He served as dean of Concordia's College of Business and Organizational Leadership from May 2008 to February 2013. A faculty member at Concordia since 1987, he is well known in the community for his work on the economic contributions of immigrants and minorities. His research has been featured in national and local media. He has also been published in the *Star Tribune*, *Pioneer Press* and *Twin Cities Business Journal*. He is on the editorial board of *Minnesota Business Magazine* and writes a monthly column for the magazine. He brings forward the policy voice and data of the ALANA communities through the online publication *Chai.News*.

Corrie has served on the boards of several national, state, and local public and nonprofit organizations, including the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Governor's Workforce Development Council, the Governor's Working Group on Minority Business Development (chair) and the World Cultural Heritage District. He has helped develop foreign study programs in India, China and Mexico and has served on international accreditation panels for business schools and programs in India and Mongolia. His travels have taken him to 25 countries and five continents.


Corrie has a B.A. in economics from St. Edmund's College in Shillong, India; an M.A. in economics from North-Eastern Hill University in Shillong, India; and a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Notre Dame.

Background

Since September 2015, the Civic Caucus has been undertaking a review of the quality of Minnesota's past, present and future public-policy process for anticipating, defining and resolving major community problems. On Nov. 27, 2016, the Caucus issued its report based on that review,  *Looking Back, Thinking Ahead: Strengthening Minnesota's Public-Policy Process*. The Civic Caucus interviewed Bruce Corrie of Concordia University and Brett Buckner of OneMN.org to hear about their work and to get their reaction to the report and their ideas on how to implement its recommendations.

About the term "ALANA." As defined by Bruce Corrie, the ALANA communities include people from the African (both African Americans and African immigrants), Latino, Aasian and Native American communities. For more information, see Corrie's previous interview with the Civic Caucus on Nov. 20, 2015, "*Minority ALANA communities are crucial economic assets for Minnesota.*"

About OneMN.org . OneMN.org is a nonpartisan, multi-ethnic coalition working to create One Minnesota. It has been in existence for over a decade and has played a vital role on many issues from voter empowerment and redistricting to business and workforce development. It describes its mission as "civic engagement and empowerment of Minnesotans to establish mutual prosperity and a shared vision of racial equity and social and economic inclusion." Brett Buckner is its managing director.

On Oct. 12, 2016, OneMN.org issued a report written by Bruce Corrie,  *Racial Economic Disparity Across Minnesota Legislative Districts* .

Discussion

Bruce Corrie's opening remarks.

One of Corrie's most significant joint projects with OneMN.org was getting involved in the Minnesota redistricting debates in 2000 and 2010. Bruce Corrie of Concordia University, Saint Paul, explained that the group testified to the Court's redistricting panel on the importance of representation of the economic interests of the ALANA communities. He said the group drew a proposed map of legislative districting "from the perspective of the chickens. Usually, the fox is drawing the map, but what if the chickens draw the map?" He said the proposed map respected all redistricting principles.

"When the final map came out of the court, ALANA representation was slightly better than in our map, even though the boundaries weren't the same," he said. "Our voice was heard."

The space OneMN.org occupies is a nonpartisan, multi-ethnic framework not necessarily aligned with any political party or any ideological group. Corrie said sometimes the group says

things that might not be popular. He offered the example of the 2016 legislative session, which he said had a good focus on equity and funding for equity. OneMN.org made the case for broad inclusion of the diversity of the ALANA communities in equity funding. This voice was heard, he said.

OneMN.org also occupies the space of One Minnesota. Corrie said people have been talking about this concept for a decade or two, but now One Minnesota is being used more widely.

"We need to clarify what we mean by 'One Minnesota,'" he said. "What is this vision of shared prosperity?"

Corrie said OneMN.org is a coalition of groups, including Common Cause Minnesota, the Roy Wilkins Center at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School, the Minnesota Indian Business Alliance, the Minnesota Broadcasters Association and the Metro Independent Business Alliance and Color the Vote. "We've moved from being very ALANA-focused to this broader organization bringing in a bigger group," he said. "The larger Minnesota group is keeping the same principles in mind."

"This is not a popular space," Corrie continued. "Political parties might think we are not aligned with their priorities. That space needs to be there. We have to keep creating that space for an open, welcoming, inclusive state. That's the future of Minnesota. How do we grow that, expand it and build it?"

The area of economic development must be explored in depth. America is currently following a very hypocritical policy, Corrie said. For years, American economists told the world to adopt free market and free trade policies. There were costs to adopting these policies, such as increasing unemployment and deindustrialization. But our economists told other countries to take the "bitter medicine," as this was good for their economic health. America is facing a similar challenge today in a globally competitive world and instead of retooling our workers and making our economy strong, we are advocating the same policies we lectured these countries not to follow.

Countries around the world don't want to follow that advice, Corrie said. Maybe there is room for different economic models, such as:

- The social benefit corporation, which Minnesota has adopted, that integrates a social interest into a corporation.
- **MnVest**, a Minnesota law effective in 2015 permitting investment crowd funding, a new way to fund Minnesota's growing businesses. MnVest enables Minnesota businesses to legally advertise investment opportunities to all Minnesota residents.
- Alternative financing. Corrie noted the Islamic-based model of profit sharing.
- Cultural assets as a strategy of economic development, such as the "Little Africa" or "Little Mekong" models.

Why can't we better market the current workforce development infrastructure-institutions from higher education to foundations to workforce? Corrie said if someone is looking for a job, the only

way that person is going to access that system is by already knowing about places like [Summit Academy OIC](#) or [Saint Paul College](#), a community and technical college. Or, perhaps, the person has received information from those and similar programs.

"We should think about a system that comes from the bottom up," Corrie said. Politicians know how to tailor their messages to particular voters, he explained. And marketers know which coupons to send to particular people. They put data together to find out about people. "Why can't we know about people and figure out how they could improve their skills? It's a different way of thinking. How can we get workforce opportunities to reach the masses?"

K-12 math and science education is in a pitiful state in Minnesota. "If my child is not getting good math and science education, I'm condemning him or her to a life of under average income," Corrie observed. "They're not going to be able to deal with the technologies of the future. Nobody's talking about this, including the Legislature."

He recommended focusing on learning labs for part of the school day. "In these learning labs, I'm intuitively showing the student what a derivative in calculus means," he said. "We're losing our generations of people. Math and science are not popular, not hot. That is the single best strategy for lowering the achievement gap."

How do we get a comprehensive strategy at improving the success rate in higher education that includes support services and a culturally intelligent classroom? Corrie pointed to a [Feb. 16, 2017, article in *MinnPost*](#) that reports on a grant to Concordia University and Saint Paul College to provide support services to at-risk students who are in danger of dropping out, even though they are near to finishing their postsecondary programs. The grant came from the Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping make college a reality.

Perhaps we could identify specific areas like these where we and the Civic Caucus could have some concrete strategies together. Corrie closed his remarks with that comment.

Brett Buckner's opening remarks.

We are retrenching back to old ways that are not allowing us to move our society forward. Brett Buckner of OneMN.org said Minnesota is browning very quickly, especially in the southern and western parts of the state. "A lot of towns in those areas were only saved by migration in from across the globe," he said. "We have maintained economies, but it's not being acknowledged at the state Capitol or even the county seats across the state."

"We have to become real about what's at stake," he continued. "It is the great life that has been created in the great state of Minnesota." He noted that he is a graduate of North High in Minneapolis and is a product of the "Minnesota Miracle" of 1971, legislation that provided greater funding equity by greatly increasing the state's role in funding K-12 public schools and local governments. "We worked together to see that all of our citizens have a decent life," he said.

"Now we're actually falling away from what made us great," Buckner said, "such as the funding process within our systems. But we're forgetting about basic things to make our state better into the 21st century."

Michael Langley, CEO of Greater MSP, has said the state will have 100,000 new jobs by 2020, Buckner said, but not enough workers to fill them. "We have to start thinking about how we're going to prepare for these grand opportunities," Buckner said. "We have to get beyond these binary conversations—Democrats/Republicans, black/white, Greater Minnesota/metro—in order to assure that all of us are part of an open, welcome, inclusive society. Or else we will fail. We will fail in Minnesota because we are entrenched in old ways we can no longer afford."

When we start talking about public policy and the public policy process, we must include all Minnesotans into the conversation and the process. "To date, we have not done that," Buckner said. In looking at the last election cycle, he said he was "appalled" at the rhetoric and the amount of dark money coming in from across the world to maintain the status quo. "If I'm able to put enough money down on a specific group, I'm able to control how the group acts and to get money back out of it," he said. "But that is not the Minnesota way."

He asked how we start getting all 5.4 million Minnesotans involved in the policy process. He noted that Wy Spano, director of the Master's in Advocacy and Political Leadership (MAPL) program at Metropolitan State University, taught his students that "politics is how we take care of each other." "The great conversations that have to take place," Buckner said, "have to be about how we take care of each other. Everybody has a role in continuing to make our society great."

He said our networks are fractured, based on old-school thought. "We can no longer think of 20th-century ideas to solve 21st-century problems," he said. We must become innovative, using technology, and take more time and care to listen and to understand what's going on locally and how it affects the state.

Questions and Discussion.

People aren't getting that they have to be interested in math and science. Corrie pointed out that there is a disconnect between the programs we have in math and science and the cultural bias against getting into those fields. "It's the culture of middle schools," Corrie said. "That's where the revolution has to occur. If you lose them in middle school, you've lost them."

There is no national focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) learning. An interviewer made that comment and said companies like Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Northrup Grumman have outstanding STEM programs in their communities. "Kids need interest and a purpose," he said. "We need a national purpose. Maybe it's curing cancer. Let's get that visible. We don't talk about it, so the kids and the parents don't connect. Just focusing on education won't fix it."

Are social benefit corporations working someplace? An interviewer asked that question. Public benefit corporations, explained in a [Feb. 6, 2015, *Star Tribune* commentary](#), are for-profit corporations that legally declare their decisions will contemplate public good as well as profit. Legislation allowing them to exist in Minnesota took effect in 2015.

Corrie said an example of this type of corporation is **Sunrise Banks**, which has four locations in Saint Paul and two in Minneapolis. "It has as its mission to serve the inner city," he said. On its website, Sunrise Banks states that all of its business lines "are not only held to financial sustainability goals, but also demonstrate progress in achieving positive social impact." The company is a certified B Corp "for its demonstrated commitment to transparent corporate governance and positive community impact." Corrie said it would be worth exploring these Minnesota corporations in depth.

The Civic Caucus could move from being a think tank to being an action tank. Corrie made that remark and said OneMN.org could work collaboratively with the Civic Caucus in, for example, looking at models of public benefit corporations in the state, working with foundations and getting chambers of commerce to talk about these models.

An interviewer commented about the need for the Civic Caucus to improve the diversity of both its interview group and its e-mail recipients to get a broader perspective and asked Corrie for suggestions on ways to do that. Corrie said OneMN.org could benefit from Civic Caucus expertise and could help the Caucus develop a larger base of consensus around policy issues.

Common Cause Minnesota is developing small learning communities around the state.

Buckner, who chairs the Common Cause Minnesota advisory board, said working with these small communities offers a way for local people to offer ideas on local issues and also to offer ideas that can bubble up to the state level. "This expands opportunities for networking and empowers the local community," he said. "As soon as you empower people locally, it makes things a lot easier and truly opens the doors for everybody."

Buckner offered the learning communities as an example in response to a question about how the Civic Caucus might expand its reach to the ALANA communities. Corrie added that, to be inclusive, the Civic Caucus must try to get the widest possible feedback and participation.

What exactly are the learning labs Corrie discussed and the learning communities Buckner discussed? An interviewer asked that question. Buckner responded that the small, local learning communities allow people to see problems right on their own block and act on them. "There's a market for this, but we must commit to it and support it with resources," he said. "Why aren't the state and the philanthropy communities investing more in these types of conversations, which will only strengthen our communities?"

An interviewer commented, "When we say public policy, we make a huge mistake by orienting that to the Capitol. Public policy is what we do with our neighbors and families. Let's talk about starting at the bottom and letting ideas come up from there."

How can we succeed in deepening the public-policy discussion, given the current climate we have? An interviewer asked that question and said he's not hearing the kinds of issues Corrie and Buckner have talked about in the broader community. "How do we actually solve these problems in a deeper way?" the interviewer asked. "There doesn't seem to be a broader market for what we're all selling. How do we create that market by what we do?"

Corrie responded by asking whether we consider our market to be only the existing players. "There are vast masses of the public who are still not connected," he said. "We are competing with other

voices, but it's still a small universe of maybe 100 people. But there are 5 million people in the state we haven't connected with. How do we connect with them? That's where the voice will be heard."

Buckner commented that people want an issue to be relevant in the same way that Sputnik galvanized science. He noted that earlier, the Great Depression also galvanized people and made them realize we had to do things differently. "We needed to involve as many people as possible and move the conversation ahead as quickly as possible," he said. Today, too, we need to look at what the underlying issues are and get deeper into them. "Don't get caught in a 15-second sound bite," he said.

"How do we make issues relevant to the individuals, so they're able to share and be heard and acknowledged and things are acted upon?" Buckner asked. "We need to at least walk people through the process and show them this is a way to stay engaged. We must make sure that we're thinking about how we make people's lives better as a collective."

"I'm concerned that we're falling backwards on this conversation, because of our comfort and our lack of ability to connect," he continued. "It's just easier to check out. How do you re-engage people and uplift them to tell them they might have the solution? We need to let them know that the solution is out there, but we're not sharing it. People don't think things are going to happen."

There are intriguing opportunities for partnerships here. Paul Ostrow, chair of the Civic Caucus, closed the discussion with that comment to Corrie and Buckner. "We have power in our passion and our ideas and hopefully we can follow up on some of the compelling things you said today," he said.