



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 29 February 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 29 February 2016
Page 2550
Questioner
Speaker Jones, Stephen, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (12:24): I applaud the persistence of the member for Leichhardt, who has been an advocate on this matter inside his party room and inside the parliament for many years. Whilst I am handing out praise, I cannot move beyond the member for Griffith, who has indicated that she will do everything in her power to ensure that this parliament, the 44th Parliament, has an opportunity to vote on the question of marriage equality.

It is good that this bill is before the House. I remember when I introduced a bill into the 43rd Parliament; it was received by a very passionate debate but, unfortunately, the bill did not succeed. In fact, it fell some 33 votes short of the majority that was needed in the House of Representatives to pass into law, only receiving 42 votes back then. But we know that the matter has moved on.

I moved that bill in the last parliament, my first parliament, because, although I had not put it at the top of my in-tray when campaigning for my first term as a member of parliament, I turned my mind to the issues and to the values that drove me to come here: principally, the values of equality and dignity—that is, treating all persons equally—and I could not find a good argument against the cause of marriage equality. However, when I listened to all of the arguments that were put up against changing the Marriage Act to recognise the marriage of same-sex couples, it became very obvious to me very quickly that the arguments against marriage equality were not against marriage itself; they were against the relationship. And it was on that point that I had to differ.

So I am pleased that this parliament is having the opportunity to debate the motion, and I sincerely hope that the matter gets brought before the House. I remember that, when I spoke in this chamber at the conclusion of the debate on my bill, the then member for Wentworth, the now Prime Minister, gave an impassioned speech—one almost identical to the speech that I myself had given three months earlier—and said that, had he been given a free vote, he would have voted in favour of it. Well, if only the member for Wentworth were in a position to change that! He is only the Prime Minister of Australia! If only he were in a position to change this issue!

Instead we have this proposition that, sometime in the life of the next parliament, we are going to have a referendum on the matter. I am not opposed to referendums, but we do have to wonder why this matter is proposed to be put to a referendum, given that it is our job, as parliamentarians, to vote on matters that are put before us, and we have a matter put before us.

We are told that the cost of that referendum is going to be \$160 million—only for it to have a non-binding outcome. We know that there are 72 per cent of Australians of voting age who already support the proposition, and yet we are asked to spend \$160 million on a non-binding question, which will then have to come back before the 45th Parliament.

When you look at the reasons for it being put to a referendum, we know the answer to that: it was to get the former Prime Minister out of a fix that he had in his party room. He had a difficulty in his own party room, so the bolthole that he proposed, to get out of that political problem, was to have a \$160-million referendum—to get himself out of the difficulties he was having in his own party room.

I actually trust the capacity of the Australian people to engage in a spirited debate on difficult questions. But I have to say that I have been concerned when I have read, over the last month, about propositions from the Australian Christian Lobby. I know that they do not represent all churches and all people of faith, but they are an authoritative voice and they are seriously representing the idea that we are going to have to suspend our antidiscrimination laws so that they can put their case about why gay marriage should not exist.

I would say that there are arguably bigger questions. In this parliament, we have made decisions to send troops to war. There have been decisions made—or there have been attempts to make decisions—to undermine the Medicare Safety Net. A better question to put before the people would be on Indigenous recognition in the Constitution. Those are the things we should be talking about.

Debate adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 12 : 30 to 16 : 00