



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Marriage Amendment Bill 2012

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 18 June 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Leigh, Andrew, MP

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Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (20:53): This is the fourth occasion on which I find myself speaking on same-sex marriage. I spoke in favour of same-sex marriage in this place on 13 February of this year, the day before Valentine's Day; on 24 August last year I reported back to parliament on the views of my constituents; and on 30 July last year I spoke to the ALP ACT national conference on the issue. So I wanted to use the opportunity today to read into *Hansard* some of the stories of my constituents which I have received over recent months. Daniel Edmonds wrote to me:

When I was young, I asked my grandmother what her view would be on having a gay grandchild. Her response was steadfast: "I could not support it," she said. "It would be against God, and against everything I believe in." Years later, I came out to my family before leaving home to move to university (an economics degree!). My grandmother was unsteady in the knowledge that she now had a gay grandchild, something that was seen as uncommon in North Queensland at the time. It was years before she was able to bring it up in conversation with me. However, when she finally did, it really moved me. "I want you to know that I will always support you, and love you, no matter who you love." Ever since, she has met my partners, opened her arms to them as part of the family, and consoled me when those relationships didn't last. I am very lucky to still have my grandmother, but I only regret that in all likelihood my grandmother will not be able to attend my wedding day. I appreciate you fighting for the right of future grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters to be able to attend the wedding days of their beloved family members.

Ian Brown wrote to me:

My partner, Roger, and I have been together for (gulp) 40 years and were 'civilly united' in 2006 under UK law, as he holds a UK passport.

We had our ceremony in the British consulate in Sydney—they said we could have a maximum of six guests so naturally we invited 30!

It was one of the most exciting days of my life and I will always remember my late mother's tears of joy on our finally being 'married' after a 34 year 'engagement'!

Another constituent, Bill, from Ainslie, wrote to tell me of his experience watching an interview with Bishop Pat Power on 7.30 last Friday. In that interview Bishop Power said:

... where two people have that definite commitment to each other and if they make the decision before God well I would say that their blessed in that life that they're living and they do that with honour and respect for one another ... I would want those people to feel at home within the life of the church.

Bill had written to me previously to say that he did not support same-sex marriage. He wrote to me after seeing that interview and said:

Good Morning Andrew,

For what it's worth and just to let you know, after hearing Bishop Power speak and having met and spoken to several Gay people myself I have now changed my mind and support Gay marriage.

I felt that you treated my position then with respect and I appreciated that. I'm sure there are many others in the community who are wrestling with this issue and who will, with time and reflection, come to see the justice of the homosexual case.

There are many people of faith who have taken the view that we should support same-sex marriage. Writing in the *National Times*, the Reverend Harry Herbert, the Executive Director of UnitingCare NSW/ACT, refers to the fact that in the latter part of the 19th century there was a campaign to remove from marriage acts the restriction

that a man could not marry a sister of his deceased wife. When it was proposed by colonial governments in Australia to remove the restriction, churches led the charge against it. Reverend Herbert quotes the Reverend Adam Cairns, who at the time described the proposed change as a 'deliberate treachery to the cause of truth' and said, 'By the unchangeable word of God such marriage is incestuous.' Reverend Herbert points out that this seems to be a selective reading of the Bible because the Book of Deuteronomy in fact enjoins a man to marry his deceased wife's sister. But the broader point that the Reverend Herbert makes is that churches should not impose on nonbelievers a vision based on faith.

In his *I have a dream* speech, Reverend Martin Luther King spoke of the promissory note that African-Americans were bringing to be cashed. In that speech he said that America had defaulted on her promissory note as far as her citizens of colour were concerned but that they did not believe that the 'bank of justice is bankrupt'. The same principles bring gay and lesbian Australians to this House to call for us to support same-sex marriage laws. I do so with a respect for those who disagree but with a passionate belief in the justice of this cause.

Debate adjourned.