



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

MATTERS OF URGENCY

Same-Sex Relationships

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Joyce, Sen Barnaby

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Senator JOYCE (Queensland—Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (16:24): Quite obviously, this is an emotionally loaded subject. I have to say at the start that it is another of those Green wedges where they jump onto an issue and try to hijack it without any concern for the consequences. Once you redefine the nature of the relationship, you affect not just the person for whom you are redefining it but for all people who have seen themselves in that kind of relationship. Those people also have their position redefined.

Senator Hanson-Young interjecting—

Senator JOYCE: I listened to you, Senator Hanson-Young; do you want to just be quiet? By redefining marriage you not only redefine for everybody now; you also redefine it historically. You redefine how people see their parents' marriage, their grandparents' marriages. All of this is part and parcel of the process.

People quite naturally come to this chamber with a sense of great emotional attachment to the term 'marriage'. It seems that this is being portrayed as an issue of Christian edict. It goes way beyond that. It is as much a Christian edict as it is a Buddhist edict, a Hindu edict or an Islamic edict. We live in a society that holds to certain tenets, including a belief in a multicultural society. For all these people we should also give thought to what this chamber puts forward, because we are defining it for them. We want to make sure that they have a right, and a strong attachment, to marriage as being between a man and a woman.

Another very important point is that both sides promised that the definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman was never going to be challenged in this term of parliament. That promise was made by both sides. We should honour those promises. Those promises were made because people feel so strongly about this issue. When we broaden a term we do not just broaden it; we water it down. The broader it gets, the more its meaning is diminished. That is something that people feel so strongly about.

Why is this issue before the parliament? It is here because under section 51(xxi) of the Constitution the Commonwealth parliament has the power to make laws in relation to marriage.. That is why we are having a discussion about it. It has become a political issue. Because it is a political issue, people have political positions. They have every right to express their position. We are absolutely overwhelmed by emails with messages supporting the institution of marriage as it currently stands—they literally come in their thousands. When breakfasts and other functions are held in this place they are packed out with people who respect the institution of marriage as it currently stands. We have a right to represent their views.

This issue ultimately becomes drawn into the complex tapestry that is the issue of discrimination. I do not think that this is an issue of discrimination. By reason of everything we are, there are certain things that we are and there are certain things that we are not. As much as I might like to call myself short, I am not short; I am taller than average. I might like to call myself olive. I am not; I am fair. You are either a man or woman. Things are defined by reason of what they are, and they always have been. To say that a definition holds true is not to be discriminatory; it is a statement of fact. The historical statement of fact about a marriage is that it is between a man and a woman. That is how it was defined. That is how history has defined it. That is the historical reflection of the history of every family in this chamber.

Not every marriage is successful. I understand that nearly half, unfortunately, are not, but nobody goes into a marriage with the idea of it falling apart. Everybody realises that not every marriage is a statement of love. There are some marriages that certainly lack love, but they are most certainly a marriage. That saying, 'I love someone,' can somehow equate to marriage and that marriage is love and love is marriage is not necessarily correct. A marriage is an arduous sea that people try to navigate. Whether we like it or not, marriage is by definition, historically and through the structure of society, an institution between a man and a woman. Whether we like it or not, whether it is politically correct or politically incorrect, it is the cornerstone on which our nation stands and on which our society stands. If we keep pulling the rug out from under each section of that which makes a

society stand up society will ultimately fall over, because we will have reached the point of making everything meaningless.

In this debate, and I am sure this debate will go on, there has to be respect for the different views held by people throughout the chamber. On behalf of my colleagues in the National Party, with whom I have spoken, I am very much of the view that, while not every marriage is perfect, marriage is a statement between a man and a woman. It must stay that way not because of what we want but because of what society needs.