

'SIT DOWN GIRLIE'



Lesbians and gays court out

The federal government's recognition of same-sex unions is tipped to save it \$66 million over four years. This is because many same-sex couples will have the rates of their social security benefits reduced to match those of heterosexual couples. (*The Age* 15 May 2008). Meanwhile a former Family Court Judge Alastair Nicholson has written to federal Attorney-General Robert McClelland advocating that same-sex couples should have access to the Family Court to settle property disputes, and to other federal courts and tribunals. Currently the only way these couples can access courts in property disputes is through extremely expensive Supreme Court proceedings. Right wing Christian lobbyist Jim Wallace has strong reservations, arguing the move would undermine the traditional model of the family.

The judiciary runs amok

Meanwhile California has become the second state in the United States to open the way to same-sex marriages. The California Supreme Court has ruled that a ban on same sex-marriages is unconstitutional. The Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has said he will uphold the ruling and won't be seeking to amend the State constitution to overturn it. Same-sex couples have welcomed the decision with tears of joy but old spoilsport Bruce Hausknecht of Focus on the Family Action is disappointed and says the Court, not the people, is changing the traditional definition of the family and 'the judicial system [is] running amok'. (*The Age* 17 May 2008).

And he might just be right

Further evidence of judicial running amok-ery has also been detected in California where a man has won the right to take his wife's surname (*The Age* 7 May 2008). Michael Buday wanted to use his wife Diana Bijon's name when they wed but it has taken two years, a law case alleging sexual discrimination and a change in Californian law to allow him to lawfully do so. When he finally picked up his new driver's licence in the name of Michael Bijon Diana said, 'Women have fought so long for equal rights and it feels like this is part of that fight. I am really, really proud of him. Not many men would do this.'

A woman's place

It's a long slow journey but the number of women serving the world's parliaments is creeping ever upwards. The International Parliamentary Union in its latest Annual Report reveals that by January 2008 the percentage of women in parliaments had risen to 17.7 per cent.

The morning after

New Zealand health authorities have authorised pharmacies to give out free morning after pills to try to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancies.

Loving Mildred

The death of Mildred Delores Loving in May 2008 reminds us of the brave fight to overturn America's segregation laws. Mildred, a black woman, was banished from Virginia because she had the gall to marry a white man. Her anger in response to this injustice led to the overturning of the State's last group of segregation laws in 1967. The then Supreme Court Judge Earl Warren said the miscegenation laws violated the US Constitution's equal protection clause. On 11 July 1958 the county sheriff and two deputies had burst into the couple's bedroom shining lights in their eyes demanding to know from husband Richard Jeter who he was in bed with. When Mildred said, 'I'm his wife' and pointed to their marriage certificate they were told, 'That's no good here.' The certificate was from Washington DC. The couple was jailed and sentenced to prison but under a plea bargain agreed to leave Virginia and not to return together for 25 years. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement Mildred sought help from the Attorney-General Robert Kennedy who referred her to the American Civil Liberties Union and after a long battle she finally succeeded in 1967.

Abortion options

The Law Reform Commission of Victoria has released a document which outlines three options for abortion law reform which will be the subject of a conscience vote in the Parliament. Victoria's MP's will decide if abortion has any or no place in the criminal law. The choices are:

Option A: A doctor would assess whether the continuation of the pregnancy posed a risk of harm to a woman and a doctor who performs an abortion when not satisfied of risk of harm would be guilty of professional misconduct.

Option B: A woman's consent provides lawful authority for an abortion up to 24 weeks gestation after which the abortion would be legal only if one or two doctors deemed continuing the pregnancy would pose a risk of harm to the woman. Doctors who performed the abortion unlawfully would be guilty of professional misconduct.

Option C: A woman is the final decision-maker throughout her pregnancy. No abortion on demand as a doctor must still agree that the abortion is ethically and clinically appropriate. Unlawful abortions would be those conducted without the woman's consent or performed by unqualified people.

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