



Speech by

Rachel Nolan

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard Tuesday, 9 November 2004

FAMILY FIRST PARTY

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (12.12 p.m.): The last month has brought one of the biggest shifts in Australian politics we have seen in many years with the emergence for the first time of a religious Right similar to the one which inflicts itself on the United States. While the Family First Party may have secured only two per cent of the national vote, with Liberal and Labor preferences it now has a senator. A number of the new Liberal MPs claim Pentecostal churches as their base, the National Party has begun to claim traditional family values alongside agrarian socialism in its policy platform and all of a sudden Australia is engaged in a moralising debate about abortion, a matter of political consensus for decades. Even worse, the Howard government now has compulsory voting in its sights—a straight steal from America where the disadvantaged do not tend to vote at all and the Republicans organise huge blocks of conservative voters through their political allies in the churches.

I am more than comfortable with Australia's Pentecostal churches. Indeed, as a practising Catholic, I think the old churches could take a leaf out of their book when it comes to taking faith to the people. But their overt and, in the recent election, secretive intervention in Australian politics is a dangerous trend which threatens the separation of church and state, public and private life and the system of liberal, secular democracy. The emergence of the religious Right through the Family First Party is an attempt to imply—as the PM did last year with public education—that if people do not have conservative values they do not have any values at all. The very name 'Family First' is a transparent attempt to hijack the concept of family, implying that the majority of Australians who do not live in traditional families are somehow not the real thing.

It leaves one asking: what about everybody else? What about the 30 per cent of Australian adults who have never married, the 15 per cent of all families who have a single parent, the 28 per cent of Australian women who will never have children, the millions who divorce and the 30 per cent who are not Christian? And that is without even touching on the 15 per cent of Australians which a La Trobe University study found to have had some homosexual experience. This new religious Right is selling a philosophy that is based not on love for one's fellow man but on a selective reading of the Old Testament that splits people into moral winners and losers.

Australia does have a set of values. As I did Meals on Wheels last week, I saw a home-made sign on a car that said, 'Diversity, tolerance, justice, the environment. These are our family values.' I thought, 'Hear, hear!' Australia is a nation founded on the fair go. We believe in fairness, justice and opportunity for all people. We believe in reconciliation, tolerance and multiculturalism. We believe in freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of religion, and we believe so strongly that people should not be discriminated against on the basis of their gender, colour or creed that we made it law more than 30 years ago.

As a nation and as individuals we need strong values, but we also know that the strongest motivation to do right comes from within—not from a bunch of people moralising on the sidelines. Australians do not want to be told how to live by a bunch of religious fringe dwellers, a bunch of frustrated pants men looking to justify their own unhappiness. They want government not to preach at them but to create a society which is strong, free and fair. I will not be told that I am a value-free zone by a bunch of self-appointed morals crusaders, and I will not remain silent while these people offend and marginalise decent Australians by misusing the name of family or of God.