



Since becoming a senator in October 2015, it has been an honour to represent LGBTI Australians in the Australian Parliament, both through holding the portfolios of Marriage Equality and Sexuality, and also being the first openly gay man to represent South Australia in the Senate. I hope that you find this update informative and useful. If at any time you wish to unsubscribe from this communication, please let me know via [return email](#).



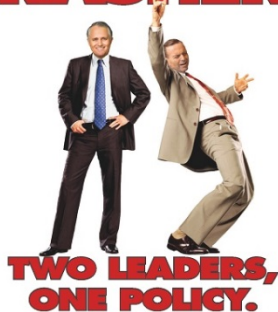
First speech

I spoke about sexuality and marriage equality in my first speech in the Senate on 13 October. As well as reiterating the Australian Greens' commitment to getting the job done in the Australian Parliament to legislate for marriage equality, I shared some of my own experiences in my journey with sexuality. To young LGBTI Australians, I said this:

"I want to say today to any young person who might be struggling with their own journey with sexuality or gender identity, things really do get better. Our nation is changing, our world is changing and you have a bright future ahead of you. Be brave, be strong and be proud of who you are."

[You can read the full text of my first speech on my website.](#)

WEDDING CRASHERS



Wedding Crashers

In November I launched a postcard campaign calling on Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to provide a free vote on the issue of marriage equality in the Australian Parliament.

While Tony Abbott may have been replaced by Malcolm Turnbull as Prime Minister, the Coalition's policy position on marriage equality remains the same: they are still pushing the idea of a costly and divisive plebiscite, stalling this long-overdue reform.

Two leaders, one policy – when the Australian community knows it is truly time for the Parliament to take the lead and legislate for marriage equality.

Sign a Wedding Crashers postcard and my office will send it to Prime Minister Turnbull on your behalf. [Please contact my office if you would like some postcards.](#)

No plebiscite

I also spoke in the Senate against the idea of a plebiscite on marriage equality:

“Poll after poll shows this is a reform that not only enjoys majority community support but support from a sizeable majority of the community. Indeed, 72 per cent according to the latest Crosby Textor poll... As thousands continue to march for equality in our nation, it is clear this movement will not be silenced. The community is looking to the parliament to legislate for this reform. It's in our power to do so... I am proud to be a member of a political party that supports marriage equality in this parliament - every vote, every time. No delays and no excuses.”

[You can view the full speech on my website.](#)



Minus18's Same-Sex and Gender-Diverse Formal

In November I had the pleasure of attending South Australia's first Same-Sex and Gender-Diverse Formal, hosted by [Minus18](#), a youth-led organisation for LGBT youth, and supported by the [Safe Schools Coalition](#), a national network of organisations and schools working together to create safe and inclusive school environments for same-sex attracted, intersex and gender-diverse students, staff and families. The event is a fantastic initiative that I felt compelled to talk about in the Senate the following week. You can [watch the full speech on my website](#), but here is an excerpt of what I said:

“School formals are all too often the source of a lot of anxiety for LGBT young people... So this formal is an opportunity to do things differently and an opportunity for young LGBT people to come together in a safe and inclusive environment. And that's a wonderful thing. I do remember my own school formal. Not that long ago, but much has changed since then – alas, I still can't dance to save my life. But I do wish when I was in school there was a program like this in place at that time.”

Taking on the Australian Christian Lobby

Given the value of work of Minus18 and the Safe Schools Coalition, you can imagine my horror when I saw that the Australian Christian Lobby had been advocating for the Safe Schools Coalition to be axed. Amongst the ACL's claims, published in the Sydney Morning Herald, were that it is "potentially damaging to students", and "teaches kids gay and lesbian techniques." Again, I felt compelled to [speak in the Senate about this](#), saying:

“... Sunlight is the best disinfectant and I do think the ACL should be held to account for the homophobia they fan in our community; held to account for the brazen lies they tell and misinformation they spread... How reckless to be pushing this in the national discourse. Next they'll be saying 'gay marriage is more dangerous than smoking'. Oh wait, they have; they have made that claim. They have made that hurtful, nasty claim, back in 2012.”

I will continue to speak out against homophobia and discrimination peddled by high-profile groups such as the Australian Christian Lobby, in the parliament and in the community.



Marching with Pride

On 14 November I was proud to lead the Greens' contingent in Adelaide's 2015 Pride March, which was a fantastic event as always. It was also wonderful to speak to lots of people at the Feast Festival Opening Night Party at the conclusion of the march.

PrEP

To mark World AIDS Day on 1 December, I successfully moved a motion in the Senate, urging access to Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) medicine for Australians at high risk of HIV transmission. You can read [the full text of the motion](#) on my website.

It was great to then learn that [New South Wales and Victoria will expand their clinical trials of PrEP](#).

The Australian Greens are pushing for federal funding to help expand these state trials to up to 10,000 people across the country, plus the expedition of the Therapeutic Goods Administration's review process and removal of other barriers to rapid HIV tests and home self-tests.

Overturing the ban on blood donation

In October I wrote to the Human Rights Commissioner, urging him to review the current 12-month blanket deferral for gay men and men who have sex with men wanting to donate blood. The Commissioner has since referred this matter to the Therapeutic Goods Administration. The Greens are concerned this blanket 12-month deferral on blood donations is discriminatory. Gay men who are practicing safe sex should not be prevented from donating blood, especially when blood donations are always needed.

Medical testing for HIV has improved dramatically in the past few years, and the review committee set up by the Red Cross Blood Service acknowledged this in their report that called for the deferral period to be reduced to six months.

It was great to speak to [Channel 7's Sunrise](#) about this issue, and also [The Guardian](#).



Let's Talk LGBTI Rights forum

I really enjoyed holding a wide-ranging discussion of LGBTI issues with my Greens colleagues Senator Lee Rhiannon and Jenny Leong MP, over some drinks at the Bank Hotel in Newtown, Sydney last month. Thanks to all who came - it was a great turnout!

What the states are doing

[Three state parliaments have now endorsed marriage equality in principle](#): Tasmania, Western Australia and New South Wales. While these are wonderful demonstrations of support by the states, as marriage is a federal issue, the only way marriage equality can be achieved is for the federal Marriage Act to be amended. The Greens will keep up the pressure on Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to catch Australia up to the rest of the world and legislate for marriage equality.



In the community

Have you seen Minus18 and the Safe Schools Coalition's new resource? Titled *All of Us*, it's a ground-breaking teaching resource that supports gender diversity, sexual diversity and intersex topics. You can [download the resource on the Safe Schools Coalition's website](#).

What a year... and here comes 2016!

As [Star Observer's excellent retrospective on 2015](#) showcases, it was a huge year for the LGBTI community. 2016 is set to be momentous too - an election year! It was an honour to be listed in [SX's '23 LGBT Australians to watch in 2016'](#) feature last month.

To find out more

If you wish to find out more information about my work with the Greens on Sexuality and Marriage Equality, please visit www.robertsimms.com.au, where you'll find my speeches (transcripts and videos), media releases, and motions. You can also find me on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), or drop me a line at senator.simms@aph.gov.au