



Photo: Andrew Gorrie, The Dominion Post

**“My personal experience with gay and lesbian couples who have adopted children is that they’ve done that magnificently”**

## John Key

Traditionally, the New Zealand National Party and the GLBT community of New Zealand have not seen eye to eye.

This isn't highly surprising, given the vehement opposition of some National Party MPs to the Homosexual Law Reform Act of 1986. Resistance to the 1985 bill, which was put to parliament by Labour's Fran Wilde, was probably best summed up by then-Invercargill MP Norman Jones, who famously said: "Go back into the sewers where you come from... as far as I'm concerned you can stay in the gutter."

Almost twenty years later, the Civil Union Bill was introduced to parliament. The rhetoric changed but the sentiment did not, as best explained by MP Stephen Franks (then-Act MP, now National candidate for Wellington Central). "I love my dog," he said, "but that doesn't mean I should be allowed to marry it."

The third reading of the Civil Union Bill in parliament was met with the resounding call of "NO" from the National Party. At the third and final reading, three National MPs voted yes and 24 MPs voted no; this 24 included then-leader Don Brash, who had previously told **express**: "I'm basically saying that two loving adults want to commit to each other, I don't see why the state can't consider doing that. I can't see how it damages anybody else's interests."

The accompanying Relationships (Statutory References) Bill, which tidied up a number of acts to remove discrimination of de facto and same-sex couples, was voted in soon after. Eight National MPs voted for the bill, including a first-term MP, who was serving his first three years as MP for Helensville. His name? John Key.

**John Key agreed to a phone interview with **express** last week, and called us en route from Auckland to Hamilton. He was quick to affirm his opposition to civil unions, and made no apologies for it.**

"They [parliament] have the responsibility to ensure that there is equity and fairness for all New Zealanders," he said. "Some **express** readers may already know that I voted against the Civil Union Bill, but I voted for the Relationships (Statutory References) Bill. I thought it was unjust that gay and lesbian New Zealanders were being discriminated against on what had been long-standing relationships, and believe that we should all be entitled to the same basic fundamental rights. Prior to the Act, rights to a spouse's pension, the right to preside over funeral arrangements and hospital visitation rights were grossly unfair and unjust, and in that regard, I believe that parliament needs to ensure fairness for all New Zealanders. Whether it's there to promote the rights of community groups is completely

different, and an absolutely active step, but parliament does have the responsibility to be fair."

Key believes his fair and balanced attitude should see him through to becoming the next Prime Minister of New Zealand, and thinks he is the change the country needs.

"New Zealand is looking for a fresh change and a brighter future. We're underperforming as a country. We're not giving hard working New Zealanders the wages they want and deserve, and I am committed to delivering higher incomes and a strong, flourishing economy.

**"I think the National Party has a really balanced perspective, especially with regards to issues such as the environment. We believe that the preservation of the environment is important, but it needs to be balanced next to the economic objectives of the country.**

"Also, I think that governments get very tired, and they lose the ability to resolve issues when they've been in power for a long time. Labour's main motivation for wanting to win this election appears to be just to stop National getting into office, not because of what they can achieve."

Key says if elected, the National Party will be able to create a coalition with myriad parties.

"We're happy to work with any smaller party that fits in with programme and vision for New Zealand, with the exception of NZ First, which we have refused to work with for a variety of reasons. Not ranking them in any particular order, I think that United, Act, Maori and the Green party would all be viable coalition partners for the National Party."

These same minor parties were unimpressed with the joint decision by Key and Labour leader Helen Clark to shut them out of televised debates, the first of which aired last week.

"The rationale is that New Zealanders want to choose their next leader in an uncluttered environment – they want to compare and contrast the beliefs, motivations and policies of myself and Helen Clark," said Key. "Doing a multi-leader debate can end up being chaotic – TV3 themselves have admitted this fact; they even sought to reduce the numbers of leaders involved in debates in 2005."

Turning to issues regarding the GLBT community, we asked Key if he thought, now the Civil Union Act has been in effect for four years, if the law went far enough – would he ever back the implementation of a gay marriage bill?

"I don't think there's a real need to change the current



legislation or to adopt new legislation – it's not something that's been actively raised with me," he says. "I do understand that there is a mixture of views in the community, but I don't think there's a huge appetite to change the scope of the current legislation or adopt a new one at this stage."

He was more open to the idea of same-sex couples adopting children, despite admitting that the incidence of adoption in New Zealand would put any chance of a legislation change on the backburner.

"Adoption is now extremely low in New Zealand – every year there are less than 100 couples that are eligible to adopt children – so I don't see it as a huge issue, although I do acknowledge that some gay and lesbian couples would feel strongly about it. I'm not a big proponent or opponent of civil union partnered couples wanting to adopt children – my main issue is that the couples that adopt children need to be loving parents who can provide a safe and happy home for the adopted child.

**“My personal experience with gay and lesbian couples who have adopted children is that they’ve done that magnificently.**

"I am genuinely very ambitious for New Zealand," said Key, concluding the interview. "I just lament that a country such as ours, with such potential, doesn't deliver on that opportunity; this is shown in the record number of New Zealanders that are leaving our shores.

"I don't believe that this is as good as it gets for New Zealand."

Would Key vote for civil unions if it were presented again today?

"No."

Would he vote for a gay marriage bill if it were presented today?

"No."

But who would he go gay for?

"Who would I go gay for?!" he responded. Then, taking a moment to compose himself, Key replies: "Brad Pitt. Now that he's a bit older, he's a bit of a looker. I was going to say Tom Cruise, but someone of his age shouldn't look that young."

What an awfully well-structured response; he's obviously given it some thought.

- Hannah JV