

Letters

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Summit's failure

I have emailed the Chair of the 2020 Summit's Committee chairperson/ secretary person Andrew Campbell twice now to inquire who, if anyone is the transgender/transsexual person nominated to attend to represent us and speak to the transgender issues of the thousands of transgender people and children across Australia with so far no reply or acknowledgement to my emails.

Ironically just a month ago I was phoned by this gentleman to warmly thank me for my comments in an open letter to the summit's chair, Professor Glynn Davis, in which I had spoken of the "spirit" of this conference to be thoroughly holistic and inclusive or else it risks being a complete failure from a moral/spiritual sense.

The average attempted suicide rate of transgender citizens is 40%, largely because of the stressors of socially systemic ignorance, prejudice, harassment and ostracisation we and transgender children endure in Australian society.

Young gay men's suicide rate as well, for example, is four times that of their straight peers.

How can any summit speak with confidence and righteousness to the "health" issues of our country while it leaves these children and citizens behind?

Linda Petrie
Via www.bnews.net.au

Glorious desperation

Rest assured everyone, Gloria Jean's is not serving up holy water in those little brown cups after all. According to Dianne Baise from GJ's Guest Relations (letters *bnews* April 17), this "sensationalist journalism" is not a reflection of Gloria Jean's true nature. Instead, the coffee chain does not "discriminate or judge anyone on any criteria" and is a "privately owned company with no affiliation to any religious institutions".

Perhaps Ms Baise needs a dictionary. By the very definition of "affiliation", Baise has directly contradicted Gloria Jean's official support and connection to Mercy Ministries. Furthermore, Mercy Ministries is a partner of Hillsong (not owned or run by, however), a church claiming to have over 20,000 attendees per week.

If we are to believe Baise's spin on Mercy Ministries, their stance differs greatly from that which has been reported. Perhaps she should sit down for a cup of that holy water with Naomi Johnson. She spent nine months with the ministry, and later spoke openly about the groups teachings on "the evils of gay and lesbian lifestyles" to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, especially by 'ex-gay' Sy Rogers.

Or perhaps Baise's ignorance is because she's never been lucky enough to attend the Ministry. Otherwise, she might have noticed this question on the application

form: "Have you ever been involved in any form of same-sex relationship?". According to another former attendee, telephone interviews include a similar question, expanded to "drug-abuse, witchcraft or lesbianism".

When AWB's Oil for Food scandal surfaced, Australians everywhere were outraged that such a large and powerful company would contribute to a terrorist government. Gloria Jean's are not terrorists, neither are AWB. But both are guilty of contributing to organisations that promote segregation, and actively inhibit people's right to exist freely.

When a business chooses a charity to support, it simultaneously aligns itself with its cause. This is the basis for Starbucks' support of CARE and Mercy Corps (unrelated to Mercy Ministries). By choosing Mercy Ministries, instead of a less strictly-religious oriented charity, Gloria Jean's has made a clear announcement to the public. But it seems no other charity ever stood a chance for the support of the coffee giant; both Australian GJ's founders are active members of Hillsong, with co-founder Peter Irvine currently serving as executive director of Mercy Ministries.

Yet Baise claims no affiliation? Dianne, I'm sending you a dictionary as you read this.

Ben Wilson
Yarraville

BSPOKE

"Every day, thousands of students are silenced. They're silenced by fear, they're silenced for being who they are. ... They're brothers, they're sisters, they're gay, they're straight, they're you, they're me."

Former 'N Sync singer Lance Bass, making a public service announcement for the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) in the US. The speech, which is being distributed virally, debuts in advance of the 11th annual National Day of Silence on April 25.

"I'm going to do everything I possibly can to make sure that one of us takes the oath of office next January. I think that has to be the overriding goal."

Hillary Clinton downplays suggestions that she and Obama will put the other as the vice presidential nominee should they win the Democrat nomination. At least she's not bitter (not like those small-town Americans who vote on issues like guns and religion - right, Obama?).

"From a standing-outside perspective, and also as someone who is gay, I think that it's a very exciting time. How exciting that we're saying, 'This can be part of the cultural fabric, now,' because it is two series regulars, two people that you invite into your home and you see every week."

Brothers and Sisters star Luke McFarlane (who plays Scotty Wandell), who came out this week, speaking about the show's commitment to queer actors and characters.

"I think a 16-year-old with a nice, sexy figure will do really well as a model as long as she's managed well. That's why I'm happy for Georgia to have a boob job because it will give her a career. She'll be more famous than Britney!"

UK model and plastic surgery fan Alicia Douvall speaking to Closer magazine about her decision to allow her 12-year-old daughter Georgia to get a boob job.

OPINION

Politics and passion at the 2020 Summit

When it came to LGBT issues it seems Kevin Rudd's "cool and clever" 2020 Summit was a bit too much like the cold and harsh world beyond.

By RODNEY CROOME

National PFLAG spokesperson, Shelley Argent was a strong advocate for LGBT issues during the Summit. To her great credit she helped persuade the Summit's *Communities, Families and Social*

Inclusion Group, of which she was a part, to include civil unions by 2020 on its final list of priorities. But when the Group's co-chairs, Baptist Minister, Rev Tim Costello and Federal Housing Minister, Tanya Plibersek announced the priority list, civil unions had mysteriously disappeared.

Costello's concerns about gambling and binge drinking were still on the list. So was Rudd's priority of one-stop child-care centres. But recognition of same-sex couples was dropped, despite having strong support from rank-and-file delegates. According to Shelley, co-chairs were responsible for ensuring the

"Did Plibersek and Costello collude to push same-sex couples off the nation's agenda?"

decisions of their groups made it to the final document. Did Plibersek and Costello collude to push same-sex couples off the nation's agenda, or was it decision made further up? Either way it reminds us of the unholy alliance between the Rudd Government and the churches when it comes to limiting how same-sex relationships are officially recognised and affirmed.

For people like Shelley the

Summit wasn't all principle-stymied-by-politics. There were some positive outcomes as well. For example, she picked up quite a bit of useful information about the Federal Government's plan for giving equality to same-sex de facto couples. It seems the Government has now identified 105 federal laws that discriminate against and disadvantage these couples. The Government is waiting for

the conservative parties to lose their Senate majority before it introduces legislation to remove this discrimination. It expects to have this legislation passed by December.

Shelley was also able to advocate when and where it mattered most, launching an impassioned plea for the recognition of same-sex parents while the Prime Minister was sitting in the seat behind her. But most of all, advocates like Shelley were pleasantly surprised by how much support there was amongst Summit delegates for LGBT equity and respect, and how vocal some of these delegates were in expressing their support.

Shelley found herself in the happy position of not being "that gay rights woman". As frustrating as the Summit may have been, these are important outcomes which bode well for Australia's future.

Rodney Croome is a well-known spokesperson and lobbyist for LGBT rights. He fronted the successful campaign to decriminalise homosexuality in Tasmania and has been the project officer of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's rural LGBT youth network, Outlink and Co-convenor of the Australia Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

www.rodneycroome.id.au

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bnews
★ MELBOURNE STAR

Level 1, 251 Swan Street,
Richmond VIC 3121
Phone: 03 9421 4199
Fax: 03 9421 5378
info@bnews.net.au

PUBLISHER
Tom Milosevic ext 8

EDITOR
Cathy Anderson ext 31
cathy@bnews.net.au

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
Daren Pope ext 33
daren@bnews.net.au

ADVERTISING & OPERATIONS MANAGER
Megan Johnston ext 12
megan@bnews.net.au

ACCOUNT MANAGER
Nicholas Gordon ext 11
nick@bnews.net.au

ACCOUNT MANAGER
Todd Buttery ext 13
todd@bnews.net.au

ADMINISTRATION ASSISTANT
David Brouwer ext 14
david@bnews.net.au

ACCOUNTS DISTRIBUTION
Tom Milosevic ext 14

ART DIRECTOR
Barney Black
art@dangerousblack.com

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS
Kaye Sera, Lawrence Akers, James Boule, Nick Bond, Kathryn Goldie, Ben Wilson, Clinton Porter, Shane Cooper, Andrea Gilbey, Andrew Koch, Virginia Sanders, Carl 'Blue' Steele

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Andrea Gilbey, Vicki Jones, Alan Mayberry

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