

Dear Michael, Aleph and the Jewish LGBTIQ+ community at large,

I would like to introduce myself, my name is Simon Gnieslaw and I am running as an Independent candidate for Bentleigh District in the 2022 Victorian Election. I am also a member of the Jewish community in the Bentleigh-Moorabbin area, although I am not running on a religious-based platform.

My Background

I am 35 years old and have spent most of my life in the Bentleigh-Moorabbin area.

I want equity for everyone: No matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, religion, lack of religion, good faith belief, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, age, health, housing status, ability or any other characteristic which is outside their control.

Social Equity and Civil Rights are extremely important to me, and my concern for civil rights started when I first heard about the HaShoah, and my grandparents' stories - not when COVID started.

My position on LGBTIQ+

I consider myself an ally, and as such it is my duty to take a step back and listen to, learn from, and amplify voices from the LGBTIQ+ community regarding their needs. I want to give the LGBTIQ+ a platform to not only help with the issues, but also elevate voices from within the LGBTIQ+ community.

When a person discloses their LGBTIQ+ status, they have my respect for sharing that information with me or publicly, because not only is it brave in a society which still places so much pressure and emphasis on heteronormativity, but it is also a significant personal milestone which requires a lot of trust in others and myself to handle that deeply personal information appropriately.

Today I learned from a dear friend that "Pride is not that we feel strongly about our non-conformity to heteronormativity, but rather a recognition of acceptance of ourselves and our fight against internalised, external, and institutionalised forms of bigotry" and I thank her for her guidance, especially when making this letter.

I think that it's sad that there are people who have had their minds warped by anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda to the point of hating people they never met for who they are.

I once had a conversation with someone who had come to think like this. In conversation, I learned that he had questioned his gender identity but was forced to stick to a cisnormative, heteronormative path as a child, and ultimately came to accept that. He had not considered that a transgender person would have a very different experience. Thankfully, he was open minded enough to change his view when he was challenged to consider the effort and risk that trans people go through in our society to live authentically. This effort is so great, that there is no other possibility than it to be part of who they really are.

Everyone deserves to be judged based on who they really are at their core - not their gender, sexuality, or physical attributes.

In many cases, these attributes are not even obvious, especially as everyone wears clothes. But bigots have this strange obsession in wanting to know what is under your clothes, which is a very private space that shouldn't ever be called into question.

Throughout my school years, I was bullied for hanging out with the girls, apparently 'for being gay' - before I even knew what being gay meant. No wonder not a single student came out in all my years of schooling in such an unsupportive environment.

I can definitely see where certain sexist attitudes are formed from a very young age, leading to attitude problems as an adult (and are harder to challenge things you learnt as a child when you're an adult).

Social Change

We need to ensure that things get better for our children, and we need to act fast, before more children suffer. Sexist, homophobic and transphobic attitudes are learnt by children from their parents. Letting these attitudes manifest as bullying is a form of abuse with long-lasting consequences in the form of trauma. There is absolutely no room for bigotry in schools.

I am all for religion (and freedom from religion) in itself, but where the kids are being harmed with anti-LGBTIQIA+ rhetoric and other forms of Child Abuse, that crosses a line where intervention is required, simply to protect the children.

From a Jewish perspective, the [Rabbinical Council of Victoria have ruled that all forms of child abuse should be reported to the civil authorities](#). It is conclusive that despite my support for religion and keeping it separate from government, some intervention to stop Child Abuse is absolutely necessary where this occurs.

Some bigots claim that schools are "Teaching kids to be gay". I just want to affirm that being LGBTIQIA+ is not something which you 'learn'. It is just something which just naturally happens. It is essential that kids, at least by the time they reach puberty, get at least a basic understanding of LGBTQIA+ concepts, health, and history, just in case they happen to be affected by it, and to be supportive of others. If they are LGBTIQIA+, they need to be accepted and given the love and support needed to embrace who they really are - not given any hatred, as is the current situation.

I am very disappointed that bigots are trying to make moral panics about issues about LGBTIQIA+ children in particular. All of these are non-issues, which only exist as issues in their own heads.

On this note, many adults need to be taught to accept other people also. It is a bit harder to change older minds, but these are conversations which I am willing to continue to have. Certainly, I have changed a few minds so far. It is better than waiting for generational change to come eventually.

Political History

Unfortunately, despite the win on the Marriage Law Postal Survey in 2017, it is not over on the path to broad acceptance, and there is more work to do to achieve equality in all areas.

There are still many public figures who are targeting the LGBTIQ+ community, even in the political space, there are bigots Left (Linda Gale - The Greens) and Right (Katherine Deves - Liberal) who threaten a resurgence of anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric.

Sadly, there are political parties out there who do not have a good recent history with LGBTIQ+.

Liberal & Family First: Don't even go there.

Labor: is not acting on the cost of living crisis. There are many issues which are particularly prevalent in the LGBTIQ+ community (physical/mental health/disability/housing/etc.) which leads to a higher cost of living compared to non-LGBTIQ+ people.

The Greens: They have openly Transphobic people in their ranks, and really need to do a membership clean out of people who don't align with their stated values

Victoria Police are still plagued with homophobia.

My Political History

I was a strong supporter of the 'Yes' vote during the Marriage Law Postal Survey. However, I was against the survey taking place, as it put LGBTIQ+ people on trial in the court of public opinion. Marriage Equality could and should have just been passed by our politicians, in keeping with Australian sentiment, the larger global movement, and common decency. To me, there was no acceptable solution less than a full, legal, marriage.

(For the record, for someone who is somewhat anti-authority, I am not fully sure about the Government having to be involved in marriage at all and legal rights should be extended to unmarried couples if they choose, but that is a different topic)

I have been involved with the Pirate Party, who are now the [Fusion Party](#), of which I am a member. They are a great bunch of people, great policies I broadly agree with. Good values. I have found them extremely supportive of LGBTIQ+ and Jewish people if you are interested in being more involved politically, and want to impact policy development.

These parties have already done a lot of work to support LGBTIQ+. The more voices to help guide the party, the better.

Solutions

I am not an expert on LGBTIQ+ matters, nor do I pretend to be. I just listen and learn. If I was elected and an issue came up which affected LGBTIQ+ people in particular, I would first and foremost seek feedback from the LGBTIQ+ community to better understand the issue from an LGBTIQ+ perspective as the people most affected by it.

Community consultation is a huge part of my platform, and core to everything that I advocate for. Everything that I do is with the most equitable and ethical approach possible.

As a firm believer of Civil Rights, I would certainly fight for outcomes with an equitable and ethical approach. I am very open-minded and will even try to persuade the opposition by making logical and pragmatic arguments which are hard for them to ignore.

Win or lose, I want to be a better advocate and activist for the community going forward. This is just the start.

Other Policies

I am also strongly supporting action on the Climate Emergency, especially from an economic perspective. Renewable energy (and not gas/coal) needs to be built out rapidly, which means more jobs and economic certainty in these uncertain times where the cost of living is spiralling out of control. The faster we build it, the sooner we don't have to worry about price spikes or shortages.

I am also pushing a policy to have Protected Bike Lanes separate from cars and pedestrians, as a healthier, more environmentally friendly, and cheaper way to travel compared to a car. Electric Bikes (eBikes) are great, it makes going uphill a breeze. If it was safe and affordable, and our city had good connectivity to get around on an eBike, I think it would be a much more popular option. Cars will always be needed for some trips – more cyclists in separate bike lanes means less car traffic, and less hazards from cyclists in the unsafe bike lanes.

Please go to my website <https://1sg.au/> if you would like to learn more about what I stand for.

I encourage you to research all the options and vote for the candidate who best represents your values. The best way to support a candidate is to give them your first preference (your "1" vote) – this shows up in the stats, and helps with funding.

I am honestly not that keen on being a politician, but I think that it is important to do this for the people of Bentleigh and Victoria to have a balance of power to keep things in check!

In the upper house, please below-the-line and in accordance with the instructions, doing an above-the-line vote has a very untransparent process behind it which may mean that you are voting for something you don't intend.

Yours Faithfully,



Simon Gnieslaw