

Pentecostal Pastor Andrew Evans Wins Parliament Seat in Australia

The former Assemblies of God superintendent, who's never held office, will represent the Family First Party

In a feat that caught Australian political analysts unaware, a Christian-based family-values party—launched in September—has won a seat in an Australian state parliament. Andrew Evans, former Assemblies of God national superintendent for Australia, campaigned for the Feb. 9 South Australia poll as leader of the Family First Party. His win makes him a member of the 22-seat upper house, the Legislative Council.

“It’s an absolute miracle,” Evans said. “In South Australia they can’t believe it. I’ve never been in politics, never been in any political party ever in my life. I’m 66 years of age, a semi-retired pastor, and I get a seat.”

Though not an overtly Christian party, Family First defends its Christian values. Its stated objectives are to promote the health, welfare and unity of South Australian families, combat the problems of family breakdown, and assist groups that support and educate families. The party also pushed issues the major Labor and Liberal parties ignored, such as literacy standards and medical facilities for rural areas.

“South Australia has major problems with young women who are pregnant in [rural locations],” Evans said. “They all have to come to the [state capital Adelaide] because of insurance costs for doctors. So we did a TV ad on that.”

Voter dissatisfaction with the major parties boosted Family First's chances. The election resulted in a hung parliament, and Labor now depends on independent members, including Evans, to retain power.

"We've indicated we'll cooperate with them," Evans said. "But there's legislation ...we'll have to put amendments in that promote our values more. And they've indicated they'd be open to any of that."

Evans said he had felt God urging him into politics for some time. Early last year, his son Ashley told him that for two consecutive nights he couldn't sleep because he had been thinking the two ought to be involved in politics. To Evans, this was God's confirmation he should run for the seat.

His son added that he believed they had "10 good years" to act against negative political trends in Australia such as the legalization of euthanasia, prostitution and marijuana—which would become irreversible after they were passed.

The two men created an executive team of legal, media and administrative professionals, and brought in experienced political experts to explain how the system worked. They launched Family First on Father's Day.

"Then we began to build," Evans said. "We worked incredibly hard. Day by day we contacted hundreds of people by phone."

The party ran 31 candidates in the election. Twenty-seven of them contended for lower house seats, with some collecting up to 7-12 percent of the vote. Though none were elected, their influence was still crucial. Under Australia's preferential

voting system they ensured that other family-supportive candidates won or retained seats.

Family organizations welcomed Evans' win. Glenn Williams, CEO of Focus on the Family Australia, said party agendas constrained Christians in the major parties.

"I think what you'll find is many people interested to see what sort of success Andrew experiences with his party, the type of responses he's able to engender from the community at large as well as the Christian community, and also the responses in parliament," Williams said. "I think that if Andrew's party can have a good impact there, we may see other people wanting to replicate that in other states."

One person who already has contacted Evans about that is Peter Stokes, executive officer of Salt Shakers, a national organization promoting Christian ethics.

"I think it's perhaps long overdue that more Christians took an interest in the political arena," Stokes, of Melbourne, said.

Looking ahead to his eight-year term, Evans said: "It's up to [God] as to how far He wants to take it."

-Adrian Brookes in Australia