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One of the surprises of the Federal election on 9 October was the success of a Victorian Senate candidate from the newly created Family First party. Only those who had studied the preference distributions lodged by parties predicted this result. Few expected Family First to poll well in Victoria, and indeed they didn't, scoring less than 2% of the vote. However, preferences from a string of parties, both large and small, vaulted Steven Fielding of Family First to victory.

Counting of Senate votes was almost complete when *Australasian Science* went to press, with Family First looking likely to fail narrowly to win a second seat in Queensland that would have given the party control of the Senate. That result could have had some worrying implications for science.

Family First has repeatedly denied "formal" connections to the Assemblies of God churches. However, almost all its candidates are members of this Pentecostal Christian group, including six of the seven members of the executive that has control of all aspects of the party. Furthermore, senior members of the Assemblies of God have circulated letters calling on all members to support Family First, and some church members report sermons and fundraising for the party as part of church services.

Family First supports adult stem cell research but describes embryonic stem cell research as "an unethical pursuit of the unscientific equivalent of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow". It has not stated its position on research into genetic modification.

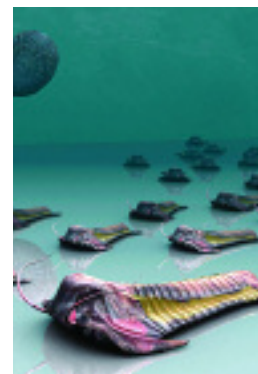
Most worrying is that at least three Family First candidates have stated their belief that the Earth was created in 6 days. When asked if it was true that members of the party believed this, Peter Hunt, the Family First candidate for Bonner in Brisbane's south-east admitted: "Absolutely. That's what the Bible says." The party's hierarchy responded to this revelation by banning most candidates from talking to the media, but did not deny that this was a widespread view within the party.

Assemblies of God churches generally have a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, including hostility to evolution and the belief that being born again gives one supernatural powers or "gifts of the spirit". These may be common views of the candidates but have been hidden, like the links with the church, in an attempt to broaden the party's appeal.

Family First did not return *Australasian Science's* calls seeking details of its position on stem cells, genetic modification and the teaching of creationism alongside evolution in schools, as has occurred in some states in the USA. However, on face value it seems that the decision of most political parties to preference Family First has placed an opponent of scientific reasoning in an influential position in the Senate.

ABOUT THE COVER

The development of primitive eyes by trilobites during the Cambrian more than 500 million years ago triggered an evolutionary arms race. Over a short period of time animals developed armour, camouflage, locomotion and other defence or attack strategies, giving rise to the 38 phyla we see today. Andrew Parker's "light switch theory" has attracted attention from the military, which is developing a computer program to model the Cambrian explosion in the hope that it can be adapted to predict future military and terrorist attacks (see pp.20-21).



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