

DAVID NORRIS

By Cillian Christie

David Patrick Bernard Norris- born 1 July 1944. He is an Irish gay and civil rights activist scholar and independent Senator. Internationally, Norris is credited with having managed, almost single-handedly, to overthrow the anti-homosexuality law which brought about the downfall of Oscar Wilde a feat he achieved in 1988 after a fourteen year campaign. He has also been credited with being "almost single-handedly responsible for rehabilitating James Joyce in once disapproving Irish eyes.

Norris is a former university lecturer and a member of the Oireachtas, serving in Seanad Éireann since 1987. He was the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in Ireland. Founder of the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform, he is also a prominent member of the Church of Ireland.

He is a candidate for President of Ireland in the October 2011 election. If elected, he would become the world's first openly gay head of state. He topped numerous opinion polls and was favourite among members of the Irish public for the position but withdrew from the race months before the election, before returning to the race in September 2011.



David Norris Abu!

David Norris was born in Leopoldville in the Belgian Congo, now known as Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where his father (John Norris) worked as chief engineer for Lever Brothers. John Norris served in the British Armed Forces during World War I and World War II; he

died while Norris was still a child. David Norris was then sent to Ireland to be cared for by his mother, Aida Fitzpatrick, and her extended family.

Norris took the Attorney General to the High Court over the criminalisation of homosexual acts. His claim was based on the fact that the law infringed on his right to privacy and that since the introduction of the Constitution of Ireland the law passed under British rule became repugnant to the constitution. The High Court ruled against Norris. He appealed his case to the Supreme Court of Ireland. In 1983, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the law by a three to two verdict.

Having lost the Supreme Court case, Norris took his case to the European Court of Human Rights. In 1988, the European Court ruled that the law criminalising same sex activities was contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular Article 8 which protects the right to respect for private life. The law was held to infringe on the right of adults to engage in acts of their own choice.

The first and immediate thing about the European decision is the enlargement of dignity and freedom for gay people – but I think a decision like this enhances the dignity and freedom of all the people of Ireland because it pushes us towards a more tolerant and plural society.

– Norris's reaction to the European ruling, 1988. This law was repealed in 1993. Norris has since then expanded his activism to a concept of "universal rights".

'I did start out on that campaign [for homosexual law reform] but I found very quickly that the mechanism of discrimination was exactly the same against women, against ethnic minorities, against the handicapped, so I broadened out and this now is how I see things, very much so.'