



The Best Year of Our Lives

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Thanks to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force for taking the steady flow of good news out of the state legislatures this year and translating it into a concrete statement of facts. The 2007 sessions have been the “most productive in the history of the GLBT movement.”

For the first time ever, over half the American population lives in areas that outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (52 percent). More strikingly, over a third (37 percent) live in areas that ban trans bias, up from five percent in just seven years.

Finally, we now have equal marriage rights for same-sex couples in no less than seven states. That covers about 20 percent of the U.S. population.

The key advances this year include several laws, either signed or to be signed shortly, include trans-inclusive civil rights laws passed in Iowa, Oregon, and for the Colorado workplace. Vermont has passed a trans-rights bill to accompany its standing law against gay bias.

Full civil unions were passed in New Jersey (under court order) and New Hampshire. Another full marriage rights bill was passed under a different name in Oregon. Speaking of that, I was struck this week by the many articles on New Hampshire’s civil union bill, compared to relatively few articles on Oregon’s new domestic partner law. Both measures passed in the first week in May, and both offer all the rights of marriage to same-sex couples under another name.

But it seems as if “civil union” now carries an implication all its own and sounds better than “domestic partner.” Likewise, California, which calls its same-sex marriage version domestic partnership, is sometimes left off the list of states that recognize gay couples by lazy reporters who don’t realize that California partners are on par with those in Vermont.

Personally, I think we should have a confusing array of maybe a dozen different names for same-sex couples. Not only will this hamper the opposition, but it will hasten the day when a majority in this country just sighs and admits that separate categories of gay marriages make no sense.

Meanwhile, speaking of confusing, Washington also passed a domestic partner law, but that status provides only some, but not all, of the rights of marriage so it doesn’t count as an equal marriage rights state.