

NATIONAL news

STATE OF THE WORKPLACE

Report indicates progress for queer Americans

by Bob Roehr

Political losses at the ballot box on marriage have not slowed the progress made by queer Americans in the workplace. More companies are embracing nondiscrimination policies and offering benefits to gay families than ever before.

That became clear with release of the sixth annual *State of the Workplace* report from the

43 percent of the Fortune 500 companies now offer domestic partner benefits, "10 times the number of companies that offered them just a decade ago." Another 14 of those companies have announced that they will begin offering benefits within the next year.

Health benefits are seen as the most important piece, but the package of other benefits also is growing for queer employees. At least 83 leading

companies now make no distinction between heterosexual and homosexual families in terms of all of their benefit policies.

Transgender people have seen the greatest increase of protections with companies adding "terms such as gender identity and gender expression in their nondiscrimination policies at a pace never before seen," Hershchaft said. In 2004, 51 Fortune 500 companies had such protections in place, an 89 percent increase from the previous year.

"I transitioned from Mark to Margaret three years ago," said Margaret Stumpp, senior vice president and chief investment officer of Prudential Financial. "For those of you who don't know.... It's really about a person's spirit and sense of self. It has more to do with aligning one's personal presentation with their own internal spirit."

There was some trepidation at the company when she announced her decision, but senior-level executives used it as an opportunity to learn more about the issues, and "everyone was uniformly supportive." It became "essentially a non-event."

John D. Hassell, director of federal and state government affairs at Hewlett-Packard, said, "Companies and states that do not recognize diversity deprive themselves of the creativity and the productivity" of those potential employees. He said it was not surprising that the most innovative and fastest-growing companies generally have been the ones that have led in recognizing and celebrating diversity.

Solmonese said, "It is time for our political leaders to follow their own favorite mantra, 'What is good for business is good for America,'" and enact similar protections and benefits for all Americans.

HRC is discussing with congressional allies the introduction of several pieces of legislation that will advance these goals. Past efforts have included the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and a measure proposed by U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., to extend domestic partner benefits to federal employees.

The *State of the Workplace* report for 2004 and earlier years can be downloaded from www.hrc.org.

BOB ROEHR is a free-lance reporter based in Washington, D.C.



From top, Human Rights Campaign executive director Joe Solmonese, along with Margaret Stumpp, senior vice president and chief investment officer of Prudential Financial, and Daryl Hershchaft, author of the report, point out the benefits of treating queer employees right.

Human Rights Campaign during a June 6 news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

"Corporate America knows that fair treatment is not just the right thing to do—it's good for the bottom line," said HRC president Joe Solmonese. "Nondiscrimination policies and equal employee benefits help recruit and retain the best talent while improving productivity by ensuring that all of their employees can provide for their families."

Daryl Hershchaft, who wrote the report, said

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