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Are you concerned that  
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## The state of gay marriage

From civil unions to same-sex marriage, the U.S. has 'em both

by Donald Miller

While the U.S. continues to embarrass itself around the globe with state after state installing discriminatory same-sex marriage bans, the country's LGBT community can take heart — there are states that offer marriage, civil unions and other alternatives.

To date, the only state that offers same-sex marriage is Massachusetts. However, the privilege is only offered to residents of the state, although Provincetown has been marrying out-of-state gay and lesbian couples since the law was put into place.

Connecticut and Vermont allow same-sex couples to have their relationships recognized through civil unions, while Maine, New Jersey and California offer some type of domestic partner registration.

The controversial civil unions law enacted in Vermont in 2000 was passed as a response to the Vermont Supreme Court ruling in *Baker vs. Vermont* requiring that the state grant same-sex couples the same rights and privileges accorded to married couples under the law.

A Vermont civil union is nearly identical to a legal marriage, as far as the rights and responsibilities for which state law, not federal law, is concerned. It grants partners next-of-kin rights and other protections that heterosexual married couples also receive. However, despite the "full faith and credit"

clause of the United States Constitution, civil unions are generally not recognized outside of the state of Vermont in the absence of specific legislation. Opponents of the law have supported the *Defense of Marriage Act* and the proposed *Federal Marriage Amendment* in order to prevent obligatory recognition of same-sex couples in other jurisdictions. This means that many of the advantages of marriage, which fall in the federal jurisdiction (joint federal income tax returns, visas and work permits for the foreign partner of a U.S. citizen, etc), are not extended to the partners of a Vermont civil union. As far as voluntary recognition of the civil union in other jurisdictions is concerned, New York City's *Domestic Partnership Law*, passed in 2002, recognizes civil unions formalized in other jurisdictions.

Civil Unions in Connecticut were signed into law by the governor on April 20, 2005, after a bill was passed by the Connecticut Senate on April 6, 2005, in a 27-9 vote. Six of the Senate's 12 Republicans and 21 of the 24 Democrats voted for the bill. Six Republicans and three Democrats voted against it. An amendment to specifically define "marriage" as being between one man and one woman failed on a 23-10 vote.

The approval of the Senate came after the bill cleared the powerful Judiciary Committee in a 25-13 vote, and after Governor Jodi Rell (a moderate Republican) gave her support for the measure. A Quinnipiac University poll released the day after the Senate approved



civil unions showed 56 percent of registered voters in support. The bill was later passed by the Connecticut House of Representatives.

Of course, that's just what's available here at home. If you want to hop across the border to Canada same-sex couples can get married any time of the day. Other countries around the globe that offer same-sex marriage are the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. On Dec. 1, 2005, South Africa's constitutional court extended marriage to include same-sex couples which will go into effect by December 2006.

## HRC Carolinas announces award winners to be honored at dinner

by Bert Woodard

CHARLOTTE — The Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Carolinas Dinner Committee has awarded Charlotte NC Black Gay Pride (CNCBGP) the 2006 Community Service Award



Charlotte Black Gay Pride will be honored at the HRC Carolinas Dinner on Feb. 25 in Charlotte.

and Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners Chairman Parks Helms the 2006 Equality Award.

In addition, the Committee has named Dr.

Ed Madden, a professor at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, the recipient of the inaugural HRC Carolinas Legacy Award.

Helms, Madden and representatives from CNCBGP will officially receive their awards at the annual HRC Carolinas Dinner on Feb. 25 at the Charlotte Convention Center. More than 1,500 guests are expected to attend. Actress Jane Lynch and HRC Executive Director Joe Solmonese will deliver the keynote addresses.

The annual HRC Carolinas Equality Award and Community Service Award highlight the accomplishments of individuals or groups that make a significant contribution to the LGBT community in North and South Carolina. The Legacy Award recognizes an individual who has contributed efforts to improve the lives and visibility of LGBT people over a long period of time and is seen as a role model to others.

"The HRC Equality Award and HRC Community Service Award and The Legacy Award are the only LGBT recognitions that are

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## Soldier's story

### Love and war

**Editor's Note:** These are the thoughts of a gay soldier — a North Carolina native — who has been deployed to Iraq. Because of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, he must remain anonymous.

I'm sitting here early in the morning — in my 10x10 concrete cell. It feels and looks like a jail cell and it's as if I'm captured by



the Army and it's restrictions — but I don't let that get me down. Above me I can hear helicopter engines winding — they fly over-

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