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## **Majority of Americans: Companies Not Government Should Decide Benefits Offered to Same-Sex Employees**

Fifth Annual Out & Equal/Harris Interactive®/Witeck-Combs Communications Survey Explores Workplace Attitudes Toward LGBT People

*San Francisco, CA and Rochester, NY—May 22, 2006* – A majority of heterosexual adults (61%) believe that a company should have the freedom to decide for itself the benefits it offers to its employees and their spouses or partners – not federal or state policy, according to the latest national Out & Equal Workplace survey. This and other workplace findings were disclosed today in the fifth annual survey conducted by Harris Interactive® in conjunction with Witeck-Combs Communications.

The survey also indicates that the benefits a company offers its employees is a critical determinant to where one works. Similar majorities of heterosexual adults (67%) and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) adults (71%) said they consider a company's employee benefits to be an important factor when choosing to work for one company over another. In addition, large majorities of LGBT adults (91%) and heterosexual adults (79%) indicated it is important that their employer offers equal health insurance benefits to all employees.

"Attracting and retaining the best employees possible is what differentiates the success of many companies today," said Out & Equal Executive Director Selisse Berry. "The impact of legislation seeking to thwart marriage equality may also make it illegal for companies to offer health benefits to their LGBT employees. We continue to applaud those companies that are advocating equal benefits and that are keeping in step with these trends."

In June, the U.S. Congress is set to vote on the Federal Marriage Amendment Act, an amendment to the Constitution that would ban same-sex marriage. In 2004, 11 states passed similar legislation that left many companies wondering whether they can still legally provide domestic-partner health benefits to their LGBT employees.

A portion of the survey explored the potential impact of this state legislation. A majority of heterosexual adults believe such legislation would have at least a moderate affect on companies, including their ability to:

- Recruit the most qualified employees (63%);
- Retain the most qualified employees (62%); and
- Remain competitive with companies in other states that can offer equal benefits (62%).

The Out & Equal Workplace survey has become an annual barometer of attitudes about LGBT issues in the workplace and is the longest-running annual survey of its kind. The national online survey of 2,501 U.S. adults, of whom 270 self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, investigates workplace attitudes toward LGBT people.

Out & Equal Workplace Advocates released survey highlights Friday, May 19, at the kickoff reception for its annual Out & Equal Workplace Summit in Chicago. The three-day Summit (September 14-16 also in Chicago) is the nation's leading conference focusing on workplace equality and is expected to attract as many as 2,000 LGBT employees and human resources professionals who will address current workplace issues in the workplace. Out & Equal Workplace Advocates is a nonprofit organization that provides support and advocacy for the LGBT community in the workplace.

"The workplace continues to lead the way in achieving LGBT equality," affirms Out & Equal board member J. Kevin Jones Jr., a managing director at Citigroup. "We see that leadership in terms of clear public support for equal treatment in the workplace, as well as in measurable progress in corporate policies. Out & Equal—particularly through programs like the annual Summit—provides the arena for progressive companies to develop and share experiences that make workplace leadership on LGBT issues alive and effective."

The survey also revealed a trend in which heterosexual adults increasingly consider diversity to be an important factor in deciding where to work. All other things being equal, the survey revealed:

- 72 percent of heterosexual adults consider it important that a company have a written nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation in addition to race, ethnicity, sex, religion, age and disability, compared to 63 percent in 2002.
- 61 percent of heterosexual adults consider it important that a company promotes and professionally develops senior managers who come from diverse backgrounds, compared to 56 percent in 2002.

In addition, the survey highlighted that LGBT adults are more comfortable with “being out” at the workplace than they were four years ago when the survey was first conducted.

- 61 percent of LGBT adults say they are comfortable introducing a spouse, partner or significant other to a boss or management, compared to 41 percent in 2002.
- 50 percent of LGBT adults state they are comfortable having a photo of a spouse, partner or significant other on their desk or in the office, compared to 34 percent in 2002.

According to Berry, “Today more than 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies provide a sexual orientation-protection clause in their EEO [equal employment opportunity] policy, including nine of the top-10 Fortune 500. In our view, having a sexual orientation protection clause and domestic-partner benefits are clear measures of the relevance, vitality and strength of an organization.”

LGBT adults are likely coming out in greater numbers due to the increased acceptance by their heterosexual coworkers. The survey reveals:

- 88 percent of heterosexual adults agree that an employee should be judged based upon one’s performance rather than one’s sexual orientation.
- 79 percent of heterosexual adults consider it important that a company offer equal health insurance benefits to all employees.
- 69 percent of heterosexual adults say that, regardless of one’s sexual orientation, all employees are entitled to equal benefits on the job.
- 51 percent of heterosexual adults indicate they would feel supportive of a coworker who came out to them as LGBT; only 19 percent say they would feel uncomfortable.

However, despite this favorable environment, little more than a majority (51%) of heterosexuals feel that LGBT people are actually treated fairly and equally in their workplace.

**(more)**

**TABLE 1****COMPANIES' FREEDOM TO DECIDE WHO THEY OFFER BENEFITS TO**

"The U.S. Congress and some states are considering passing a Constitutional amendment or other legislation that would define marriage as only between a man and a woman. Some believe if these amendments or legislation pass, it would be a good way to prevent companies from offering health and other employment benefits (such as bereavement leave) to employees with same sex partners. Others believe that government should not interfere with the rights of companies to offer equal benefits to employees with married spouses or same-sex partners. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'A company should have the freedom to decide which benefits it offers to its employees and their spouses or partners'"

Base: All Adults

	Total	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%	%
Agree	61	70	61
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	15	8	15
Disagree	24	22	25

**TABLE 2****IMPORTANCE OF BENEFITS WHEN CHOOSING BETWEEN COMPANIES TO WORK FOR**

"The types of employee benefits offered by companies such as health insurance, vacation leave and childcare support can vary across companies. How important are the employee benefits a company offers to you in making a decision whether to work for one company over another?"

Base: All Adults

	Total	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%	%
Absolutely essential/ Very important	67	71	67
Important	19	18	19
Somewhat important/ Not important at all	14	11	14

**TABLE 3****IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY MEASURES ON CAREER DECISION-MAKING**

"We would now like to ask you a variety of questions about the workplace.

All other things being equal, when making decisions about your own career, how important is it for you to work for a company that...?"

*Percent saying Extremely Important/Very Important/Important*

Base: All Adults

	Total	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%	%
Offers equal health insurance benefits to all employees	79	91	79
Has a written nondiscrimination policy that includes all of the following race, ethnicity, sex, religion, age, sexual orientation and disability	72	89	72
Promotes and professionally develops senior managers who come from diverse backgrounds	62	81	61
Has senior executives who welcome, hire and encourage a diverse work force	66	79	66
Supports community nonprofit organizations that represent the diversity of the workforce and the customer base	62	76	61

**TABLE 4**  
**IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY MEASURES ON CAREER DECISION-MAKING**  
**– COMPARED TO 2002**

“We would now like to ask you a variety of questions about the workplace. All other things being equal, when making decisions about your own career, how important is it for you to work for a company that...?”

*Percent saying Extremely Important/Very Important/Important*

Base: All Adults

	Heterosexual	
	2006	2002
	%	%
Offers equal health insurance benefits to all employees	79	73
Has a written nondiscrimination policy that includes all of the following race, ethnicity, sex, religion, age, sexual orientation and disability	72	63
Has senior executives who welcome, hire and encourage a diverse work force	66	61
Promotes and professionally develops senior managers who come from diverse backgrounds	61	56
Supports community nonprofit organizations that represent the diversity of the workforce and the customer base	61	55

**TABLE 5**  
**IMPACT ON COMPANIES IF LEGISLATION PASSES**

“If the passage of legislation within a particular state prevented companies from offering health benefits equally to the spouses as well as same-sex partners of all employees, how much of an impact do you think it would have in the company’s ability to...?”

*Percent saying A Great Deal/Quite a Bit/A Moderate Amount*

Base: All Adults

	Total	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%	%
Recruit the most qualified employees	66	90	63
Retain the most qualified employees	64	87	62
Remain competitive with companies in other states that can offer these benefits	64	87	62

**TABLE 6**  
**COMFORT IN CURRENT OR MOST RECENT JOB**

“In your current or your most recent job, how comfortable are you or were you...?”

*Percent saying Extremely Comfortable/Very Comfortable/Comfortable*

Base: All Adults

	Total	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%	%
Using the proper pronoun (he, she) when referring to the person who is your spouse, date or partner	75	68	77
Socializing with others at work who are like you	74	76	75
Introducing your spouse, partner or significant other to your co-workers	73	62	74
Introducing your spouse, partner or significant other to your boss or management	69	62	71

Discussing your after-work social life, including details about who you share time with, such as your spouse, dates, friends or partner	64	68	65
Having a photo of your spouse, partner or a significant other on your desk or in your office	63	50	65
Having a photo of your children on your desk or in your office	60	40	62
Displaying symbols or personal items at your desk or in your office that show others about your life, personal interests, or beliefs, such as a rainbow flag, Star of David, cross, or the flag of your nation of origin	55	47	57

**TABLE 7**  
**COMFORT LEVEL IN SHARING PERSONAL INFORMATION AT WORK – COMPARED TO 2002**

“In your current or your most recent job, how comfortable are you or were you...?”  
*Percent saying Extremely Comfortable/Very Comfortable/Comfortable*

Base: All GLBT adults

	GLBT	
	2005	2002
	%	%
Socializing with others at work who are like you	76	63
Discussing your after-work social life, including details about who you share time with, such as your spouse, dates, friends or partner	68	53
Using the proper pronoun (he, she) when referring to the person who is your spouse, date or partner	68	49
Introducing your spouse, partner or significant other to your co-workers	62	50
Introducing your spouse, partner or significant other to your boss or management	62	41
Having a photo of your spouse, partner or a significant other on your desk or in your office	50	34
Displaying symbols or personal items at your desk or in your office that show others about your life, personal interests, or beliefs, such as a rainbow flag, Star of David, cross, or the flag of your nation of origin	47	NA
Having a photo of your children on your desk or in your office	40	35

**TABLE 8**  
**SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND THE WORKPLACE**

“How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”  
*Percent who agree*

Base: All Adults

	Total	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%	%
How an employee does his or her job should be the standard for judging an employee, not their sexual orientation.	89	96	89
Regardless of their sexual orientation, all employees are entitled to equal benefits on the job, such as health insurance for their partners or spouses.	70	95	69
I favor written nondiscrimination policies that	57	80	56

include sexual orientation.			
Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are treated fairly and equally in my workplace.	51	60	51
It would be very difficult for an employee to be openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender in my workplace.	33	36	33
I would be uncomfortable if my boss were openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.	27	5	29
I would be uncomfortable if any of my co-workers were openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.	22	4	24

**TABLE 9  
COMFORT LEVEL IF COWORKER DISCLOSED THAT THEY ARE GAY**

"If someone with whom I had been working for several years told me that he or she is gay, I would feel..."

*Percent who agree*

Base: All Adults

	Total	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%	%
Supportive	54	91	51
Indifferent	36	28	39
Uncomfortable	18	4	19
Betrayed	8	1	9

### Methodology

Harris Interactive® conducted the study online within the United States between April 11 and 17, 2006, among 2,501 adults (ages 18 and over), of whom 2,168 indicated they are heterosexual and 270 self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender\*. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. In addition, the results for the gay and lesbian sample were weighted separately based on profiles of the gay and lesbian population that Harris Interactive has compiled through many different online surveys. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With a pure probability sample of 2,501 adults one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- 2 percentage points. Sampling error for the sub-sample of heterosexuals would be +/- 2 percentage points, and for the sub-sample of gays and lesbians +/-6 percentage points. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

\* Includes an over-sample of GLBT adults.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

### About the Out & Equal Workplace Summit

The 2006 Out & Equal Workplace Summit is scheduled for September 14–16 at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago. The Summit will bring together a record-breaking number of human resources professionals, LGBT workplace advocates, straight allies and other committed individuals from around the country to receive the latest updates on LGBT issues in the workplace. Keynote speakers include George Takei, best known for his portrayal of “Mr. Sulu” in the acclaimed *Star Trek* television and film series; Nina Jacobson, president of Walt Disney Motion Pictures Group; Richard Florida, professor of public policy at George Mason University and author of the bestseller *The Rise of the Creative Class*; and Yolanda King, the first-born daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, and founder of Higher Ground Productions.

In addition to the annual Workplace Summit, Out & Equal offers: Building Bridges Diversity Training specific to LGBT workplace issues; a growing network of regional affiliates that includes New York City, Dallas/Fort Worth, San Francisco, Chicago, Rocky Mountain, and Arizona; provides support to LGBT employee resource groups; offers a free bi-monthly Town Call phone-in conference series; a national newsletter; and the Out & Equal Institute, an information-gathering program that allows researchers, executives and diversity professionals to discuss the state of LGBT workplace research and to identify necessary future collaborative resources.

Out & Equal Workplace Advocates is a national nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization headquartered in San Francisco, California. Out & Equal™ Workplace Advocates champions safe and equitable workplaces for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. The organization advocates building and strengthening successful organizations that value all employees, customers and communities.

For more information, including how to register for the Summit, visit [www.outandequal.org](http://www.outandequal.org).

**About Witeck-Combs Communications, Inc.**

Witeck-Combs Communications, Inc. ([www.witeckcombs.com](http://www.witeckcombs.com)) is the nation’s premier strategic marketing communications firm, specializing in reaching the gay and lesbian consumer market. With over nine years experience in this unique market, Witeck-Combs Communications has developed respected relationships throughout the community and serves as a bridge between corporate America and gay and lesbian consumers. In April 2003, American Demographics magazine identified Bob Witeck and Wes Combs as two of 25 experts over the last 25 years who have made significant contributions to the fields of demographics, market research, media and trend-spotting for their path-breaking work on the gay and lesbian market.

**About Harris Interactive®**

Harris Interactive, the 13<sup>th</sup> largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world, provides clients with research-driven insights and strategic advice to help them make more confident decisions, leading to measurable and enduring improvements in performance.

Widely known for *The Harris Poll*® and for pioneering online market research methods, Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States ([www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com)), Europe ([www.harrisinteractive.com/europe](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/europe)), and Asia offices and is supported by its a wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris ([www.novatris.com](http://www.novatris.com)) in Paris and an independent global network of affiliate market research companies. Harris Interactive is headquartered in Rochester, New York, and Europe operations are based in London.

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup> and be invited to participate in online surveys, go to [www.harrispollonline.com](http://www.harrispollonline.com). EOE M/F/D/V

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