

[Sign in](#) · [Register](#)

Go to:



[Read today's paper](#) · [Jobs](#)

Search:
 Guardian Unlimited Web

GuardianUnlimited **The Guardian**

[Home](#) [UK](#) [Business](#) [Audio](#) [World dispatch](#) [The Wrap](#) [Newsblog](#) [Talk](#) [Search](#)
[The Guardian](#) [World](#) [News guide](#) [Arts](#) [Special reports](#) [Columnists](#) [Technology](#) [Help](#) [Quiz](#)



Wal-Mart wakes up to gay rights

Suzanne Goldenberg in Washington and David Teather in New York
Thursday July 3, 2003
[The Guardian](#)

Search this site

Corporate America bowed to the growing power of the gay rights movement yesterday when the country's largest private employer banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

The expansion of Wal-Mart's equal opportunities policy to cover sexual orientation was the second victory for the gay rights movement in a week, after the supreme court abolished a law in Texas against sodomy.

The new policy was hailed as a signal victory in a country where it remains legal in 37 of the 50 states to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, and where congress has for 10 years delayed a bill that would extend such rights.

[Article continues](#) ▾

In this section

[Hillary begins battle in sceptical Iowa](#)

[Chávez denies plan to seize assets of rich](#)

[25 killed in Gaza violence as factions abandon talks](#)

[It's oui to rom-coms and non to art house as cinéphiles die out](#)

[International news in brief](#)

[Pope calls for tightening up on annulment](#)

[Mailer's young Hitler novel angers Germans](#)

[Power line kills 11](#)

[on train roof](#)

[Escaped convict whistles through Dixie to visit his dying mother](#)

[Tintoretto's first show for 70 years](#)

.....
The news highlights the divide between the growing acceptance of gays and lesbians in middle America, and the refusal of politicians to acknowledge it because of the ascendancy of Christian conservatives.

"We have no federal laws protecting people from discrimination in the workplace so this kind of policy change is critically important for us," said Kim Mills, education director for the gay rights group Human Rights Campaign.

"In polls, 80% of Americans believe there should not be discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation, and corporate America has really played a leading role in addressing this. It has been ahead of the legislature and the courts."

There could be no more quintessentially middle American company than Wal-Mart, which covers up some women's magazines at the checkout because of provocative headlines, and will not sell CDs with sexually explicit lyrics.

It was persuaded to change by its own employees and a two-year lobbying effort led by four gay and ethical investment organisations, including the London-based Isis Asset Management. The four firms, which together control \$100bn (£60bn) of investments, bought holdings in Wal-Mart and then held meetings with senior executives.

The company's new policy was sent to its 1.1 million employees at 3,500 outlets this week.

"It's the right thing to do for our business," the company said yesterday. "Clearly stating our policy of respect helps us compete for talented people who otherwise might not feel comfortable."

During the last decade, many of America's leading corporations have come to a similar conclusion. More than 300 of America's 500 most successful companies prohibit discrimination against lesbians and gays.

In the top 10, Exxon remains the last company to hold out against equal rights. However, 27% of shareholders voted at its annual general meeting last May for a broader non-discrimination policy. It has become the next public target for gay rights groups, and may soon be forced to change.

In most US states it remains legal for private employers to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Only 13 states and Washington, DC provide safeguards.

The Christian right, and many Republicans, were

outraged by last week's supreme court verdict on Texas's sodomy laws. They have also begun to plan for the next battle in America's cultural wars, expected to be fought over gay marriage. Canada recognised such unions last month.

However, the White House, while remaining aloof from fulminations against the supreme court verdict, has weighed to support a "defence of marriage" bill.

"What I do support is a notion that marriage is between a man and a woman," President Bush said yesterday.

Special reports

[Gay rights](#)

[Gender issues](#)

Useful links - UK

[Stonewall](#)

[Outrage!](#)

[Peter Tatchell's site](#)

[Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights Organisation](#)

Useful links - international

[National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce](#)

[Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation](#)

[International Gay and Lesbian Association](#)

Advertiser links

[NS&I - Investments](#)

At NS&I we offer a range of savings and investments to suit...

nsandi.com

[Investment](#)

MoneyWeek provide investment tips and advice for investors.

info.moneyweek.com


[Investments at Barclays Stockbrokers](#)

We offer online dealing at £12 commission per trade, which...

barclays.co.uk

[New Car](#) | [ISA](#) | [HDTV](#) | [Broadband](#) | [Football](#)

[Printable version](#) | [Send it to a friend](#) | [Save story](#)

Daily sections 

Weekly sections 



[Privacy policy](#) | [Terms & conditions](#) | [Advertising guide](#) | [A-Z index](#) | [About this site](#)

Guardian Unlimited © Guardian News and Media Limited 2006