

# Opinion: Nevada's domestic partner register not enough

By John Cereso

It's been almost a year and a half since the Nevada Domestic Partnership Registry launched. In and of itself, this law provided gay and lesbian residents of Nevada with a tremendous step forward in terms of recognition of their relationships, but it isn't enough.

The federal government in 1996 passed the Defense of Marriage Act, and many states have either passed laws or amended their constitutions – as was the case in Nevada – that closely follow the federal law, which essentially says that only marriages between a man and a woman are recognized, even if validly performed in another state. (For the sake of simplicity, I'll often use the term DOMA – Defense of Marriage Act – when generally describing these types of restrictive laws.)

By and large, the domestic partnership ordinance in Nevada takes care of the state recognizing gay and lesbian relationships for state law purposes and limits DOMA's effect. However, domestic partnerships fall far short of full marriage equality.

Under the Nevada Domestic Partnership law, registered partners can be denied access to health care benefits offered by employers, probably the most tangible spousal benefit. Employers and insurers are able to simply say “you're not legally married, so we don't have to cover you.”

Under federal law, more than 1,100 rights and benefits to marriage exist, none of which is available to gay and lesbian couples. Yes, you can do some complicated estate planning, but virtually all of the rights marriage conveys on a federal

level are simply unavailable without full marriage rights.

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