

Civil Rights at a Crossroads: Terry Bean Reflects and Calls for Change

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Portland, Oregon Dec 23, 2025 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - At 77 years old, [Terry Bean](#) continues to stand as a defining figure in American civil rights, having dedicated more than four decades to advocating for equality, social justice, and progressive change. As a co-founder of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Gay Rights National Lobby, Bean has shaped the fight for LGBTQ+ rights both locally in Oregon and nationally. Today, he reflects on the progress achieved, the ongoing threats to civil rights, and the critical work that lies ahead.

“Age gives you perspective,” Bean says. “I’ve seen moments of hope, moments of backlash, and everything in between. Progress is never final—it requires vigilance, commitment, and a willingness to fight again and again.”

From Grassroots Activism to Legislative Change

Bean's journey began in the 1960s at the University of Oregon, where he joined anti-Vietnam War demonstrations and became deeply engaged in student activism. These early experiences taught him the power of organizing, coalition-building, and speaking truth to power. By 1971, Bean had turned his attention to local politics, lobbying the Oregon State Legislature and the Eugene City Council for a gay rights ordinance. The passage of one of Oregon's first LGBTQ+ protections in 1977 marked a historic moment in the state's civil rights history and set the foundation for Bean's national work.

"Activism isn't just about protests or speeches," Bean reflects. "It's about creating structures that can endure and influence the systems where decisions are made."

Building National Institutions

As anti-gay ballot measures gained traction nationwide in the late 1970s, [Bean](#) recognized that lasting change required a national platform. He co-founded the Gay Rights National Lobby (GRNL) and the Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF), organizations that later merged to form the Human Rights Campaign, the country's largest LGBTQ+ advocacy group. Bean's innovative approach to fundraising, including the creation of the GRNL 48 major donor network, helped ensure that the movement had the resources needed to fight effectively on a national stage.

Serving on HRC's Board since 1980, Bean has been central to political endorsements, strategic fundraising, and organizational direction. Leaders like former HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch credit Bean's vision and practical skills for the growth and sustainability of the organization.

Advocacy Meets Expertise

Bean's impact extends beyond activism. As President and CEO of Bean Investment Real Estate, he has successfully managed multi-million-dollar real estate portfolios, leveraging his expertise to support nonprofit initiatives. In 2000, he co-chaired HRC's Capitol Campaign, facilitating the purchase of the organization's national headquarters in Washington, D.C. His real estate acumen ensured that the campaign was successful, securing a permanent base for HRC's national operations.

"I believe in aligning values with action," Bean says. "Whether it's business or activism, the goal is to build something sustainable, trustworthy, and impactful."

Lessons from a Lifetime of Advocacy

Throughout his 40-plus years of activism, Bean has witnessed both victories and setbacks. He recalls the Measure 9 fight in Oregon, a ballot initiative in the early 1990s that sought to define homosexuality as "abnormal." Bean helped lead a coalition that raised over \$1 million to defeat the measure, proving the power of organized advocacy and community education.

"That campaign showed that speaking directly to people about fairness and dignity works," Bean says. "It wasn't just about defeating a ballot measure—it was about changing hearts and minds."

Current Challenges and Urgent Calls to Action

While LGBTQ+ rights have seen remarkable progress, [Bean](#) warns that civil rights are at a crossroads. Nationwide, laws are being introduced that threaten the protections that activists fought so hard to

secure. From restrictions on transgender healthcare to bans on inclusive education, Bean stresses that progress is fragile.

“Complacency is dangerous,” he cautions. “Seeing rainbow flags in stores doesn’t mean equality has been achieved. Visibility is not the same as protection. Rights can be taken away if we are not vigilant.”

Bean urges today’s activists to combine passion with policy. Symbolic gestures inspire communities, but enforceable protections are essential for lasting change. He emphasizes the need for intersectional advocacy, reminding new generations that civil rights movements are interconnected.

“When you stand with racial justice, labor groups, and women’s rights advocates, you strengthen every cause,” Bean explains. “Justice is a shared struggle, and progress for one group lifts all.”

Mentorship and the Next Generation

Much of Bean’s current focus is mentoring emerging leaders. He encourages young activists to understand the importance of coalition-building, strategic planning, and persistence. His decades of experience provide lessons in navigating political challenges, building organizations, and sustaining movements over time.

“Empowering the next generation ensures that the work continues long after any one person steps back,” Bean says. “I’ve dedicated my life to this work, and I want to see it carried forward with even greater impact.”

A Legacy of Change

[Terry Bean’s](#) career represents a unique convergence of activism and professional leadership. His contributions have transformed both local and national landscapes, establishing enduring institutions and inspiring countless advocates. Beyond legal victories, Bean has left a mark on the culture of advocacy itself, demonstrating that vision paired with practical action can create lasting change.

Looking ahead, Bean remains hopeful. He believes that by staying vigilant, united, and committed, communities can protect existing rights and achieve new milestones. “The work is not finished,” he says. “It never will be finished. But if we remain committed, informed, and united, we can shape a future where equality and justice are not just ideals, but realities.”

About Terry Bean

Terry Bean is a civil rights activist, philanthropist, and business leader based in Portland, Oregon. He co-founded the Human Rights Campaign and the Gay Rights National Lobby, helped defeat Oregon’s Measure 9, and has raised millions for progressive causes nationwide. He is also President and CEO of Bean Investment Real Estate, managing multi-million-dollar transactions and promoting sustainable business practices.

To learn more about **Terry Bean’s** legacy and current initiatives, please visit terry-bean.info.

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