

## Vt. lawmakers legalize gay marriage

### Legislature's vote narrowly overrides veto

By Andrea Stone  
 USA TODAY

The Vermont Legislature on Tuesday gave same-sex couples the right to marry, shifting a battle fought mostly in courts and at the ballot box into a new arena and giving gay rights activists their second victory in a week.

Lawmakers narrowly overrode a veto by Republican Gov. Jim Douglas to make Vermont the fourth state to legalize gay marriage.

On Friday, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that limiting marriage to heterosexual couples was unconstitutional, clearing the way for licenses to be issued April 27. Massachusetts was first to legalize gay marriage in 2004. It was joined by Connecticut last year.

"It's a proud day for Vermont," said Senate President Pro Tem Peter Shumlin, a Democrat. He said the state that was first to offer civil unions to gays in 2000 also was the first that "adopted marriage equality without a court order."

It was close. After the Senate decided to override the veto by 23-5, the House voted 100-49, the minimum needed. The law takes effect Sept. 1.

California lawmakers approved same-sex marriage in 2005 but did not muster enough votes to override Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's veto. A

state court later legalized it before voters passed Proposition 8 in November to ban such marriages.

Also Tuesday, the Washington, D.C., City Council voted to recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere in the USA. A final vote is planned for May. Mayor Adrian Fenty said he would sign the bill.

"Vermont, Iowa and D.C. are the natural outgrowths of almost five years of married lesbian and gay couples disproving daily the apocalyptic lies spewed by right-wing, anti-gay forces," said Joe Solmonese of the Human Rights Campaign, a gay advocacy group. "The sky has not fallen."

Rea Carey of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force called Tuesday a "significant turning point."

Disappointed conservatives agreed. "Vermont is a landmark," said Peter

Sprigg of the Family Research Council. He called it "a body blow" to conservatives who until now had blamed setbacks on "activist judges."

"This is an upgrade on the frontal assault against traditional marriage," said Samuel Rodriguez of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference. He said it shows the need for a ban in the U.S. Constitution.

The next move is likely in New Hampshire, where the Senate is scheduled to vote next week.

Jeremy Brown, 30, and Tom Dalton, 46, an Essex Junction, Vt., couple who plan to marry after nine years together, said their relationship would be "legitimate" whether blessed by judges or lawmakers. "We're thrilled and overwhelmed," Dalton said. "The momentum of history is behind us."



By Toby Talbot, AP

**"Turning point":** Gay-marriage advocate Beth Robinson reacts Tuesday after Vermont lawmakers' vote. At left is Sherry Corbin; at right is Susan Murray.

