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Vermont Equality

A lot has happened since 2000, the year Vermont led the country in becoming the first state to adopt civil unions for same-sex couples. Among other things, Vermont came to see that civil unions are an inadequate substitute for marriage. Creating a separate legal structure to confer some benefits on gay couples falls short of granting true equality.

On Tuesday, the Vermont Legislature formally recognized that reality. Mustering one more vote than the two-thirds majority needed, Vermont lawmakers overrode Gov. Jim Douglas's veto of a bill that grants couples of the same sex the freedom to marry. The outcome of the tense roll call became clear only in the final moments, when a Democrat who voted against the bill last week reversed his position.

The vote gave Vermont another important first. Although three other states — Massachusetts, Connecticut and Iowa — now allow same-sex marriage, the new Vermont law, which goes into effect on Sept. 1, made Vermont the only state to achieve that progress through legislative action rather than a court ruling.

Coming less than a week after the crucial ruling by the Iowa Supreme Court that extended same-sex marriage to a state in the nation's heartland, and with bills to follow suit under consideration in several other state capitals, the welcome move by the Vermont Legislature adds a vital sense of momentum and democratic duty to this civil rights struggle.

Lawmakers in New York and New Jersey, in particular, have marriage bills pending and Democratic governors ready to sign them. There should be no further delay in enacting these measures.

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