



TO: Members of the Senate
FROM: Allen Gilbert, executive director, ACLU of Vermont
DATE: March 23, 2009
RE: S. 115 -- Same-sex marriage

It is easy to forget how certain practices in Vermont that were once easily accepted are now seen as unimaginable discrimination:

- Through the 1920s, there were active KKK chapters in Vermont.
- Through the 1930s, a teacher who became pregnant -- even if she were married -- had to quit her job.
- Through the 1950s, some Vermont inns and hotels discouraged Jews as patrons.
- Through the 1960s, Vermont law allowed the charging of a poll tax before you could vote.
- Through the 1970s, you couldn't choose which days to shop -- stores had to close on Sundays.
- Through the 1980s, people with disabilities were segregated in our schools, and physically disabled people were effectively barred from accessing many facilities.
- Through the 1990s, long-term, loving relationships of gay and lesbian Vermonters were denied any legal recognition.

The kernel of every civil rights struggle is a recognition that unequal treatment weakens us as a state. Freedom and unity are inseparable. Equal justice under the law is the tie that binds us.

Our civil unions law of 2000 was a transition on the road to full equality for same-sex couples who wish to marry. It was a solution invited by the *Baker* decision, but it was nonetheless recognized as an imperfect solution.

American abolitionist Theodore Parker said during the long struggle to free black Americans from slavery, "The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

It is rare that we as individuals are given the opportunity to bend that arc. Such an opportunity is before you now. Please seize it. Grant marriage equality for same-sex couples.