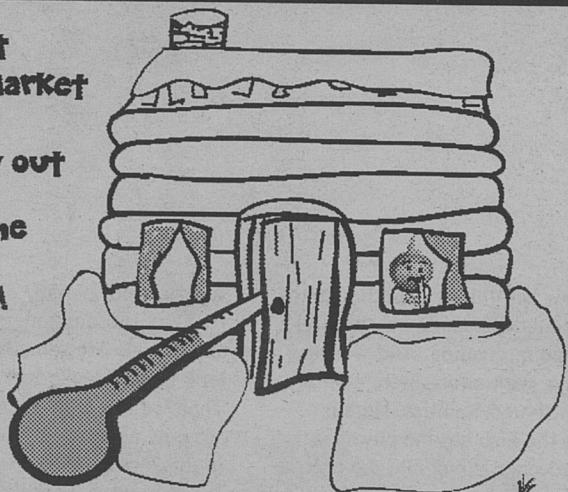


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# Views: CU's Aren't Enough Part I

It's time to look forward, not backward. It's time to stop celebrating the civil union law.

A lot has happened in the last four years since the Baker Decision. Vermont's civil union law was groundbreaking. At the time it passed, in April 2000, it shot Vermont to the head of the American pack with regard to protections for gay families, and close to the international lead. For that, we had reason to be proud and to celebrate.

Many in our community will never forget the year 2000, nor should we, with its turmoil, struggles and celebrations as the legislature answered the Baker Decision. But the civil union law resulted from a painful and difficult compromise between genuine equality and no rights at all. As we celebrated civil unions in our community we embraced what we had, instead of what was missing. The civil union law embodies "partial equality" – a concept as bizarre as "partial pregnancy." Freedom to marry advocates grudgingly supported the law only as a first step, but by no means as the end. The law represented a step forward from where we were, but relative to where we *should be*, the law still falls woefully short.

Much has changed since 2000. The entire nation of Canada will soon join Ontario and British Columbia in including same sex couples in marriage – not some



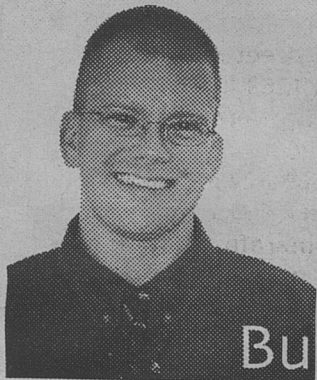
separate legal category created specifically for the purpose of keeping us separate, but *marriage*. Canada joins the Netherlands and Belgium in this regard. As a result of the recent Massachusetts high court decision, beginning in May of this year, same-sex couples will begin legally marrying in Massachusetts.

Another example of how far we have come can be seen in Massachusetts. Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney is taking a position very similar to that taken by Governor Howard Dean in Vermont. He advocated for a proposed "civil union" alternative, while working hard to exclude same-sex couples from marriage. Governor Dean was revered by many in the gay community for his stance in Vermont, while Governor Romney is rightly being acknowledged as a foe of our civil rights. How much the ground has shifted. Now, just four years later, civil unions no longer represent a step

forward. They are the fallback offering of anti-gay or just politically cowardly politicians who can't bear the thought of a true breakthrough for gay equality on their watch.

We in Vermont carried the torch for several years, especially in 2000. Now the national debate around gay marriage has passed us by. As gay rights opponents in other states point to Vermont, seeking to adopt the civil union law as a *ceiling*, rather than a *floor*, they must know that we here in Vermont aren't finished. The conversation won't be over until the choices available to us are genuinely equal. Whether you believe in the institution of marriage or not, we have the right to the choice! ▼

*Sherry Corbin is the chairwoman of the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force. This is the first in a three part series. In next month's installment, the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force discusses the intangible harms of the civil union law. In the third part, to be published in May, the Task Force describes the specific ways in which the civil union law falls short.*



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