

marriage in New Mexico died after a House committee tabled them in February.

A domestic partnership bill, which would have provided marriage-like rights to gay couples, passed the state's House this year and came one vote short of passing in the Senate.

A spokesman for New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, a Democratic presidential hopeful, said his office will seek to recognize same-sex marriages next year, when he reintroduces a domestic partnership bill that failed to win passage this year.

## OHIO

### Signature Scandal Implicates Lawmaker

An Ohio Republican state representative from Cincinnati is being tied to a petition fraud case concerning the repeal of the city's nondiscrimination ordinance.

Tom Brinkman, the lawmaker behind the bid to repeal Cincinnati's ordinance, has been accused of knowing that names used to get the issue on the ballot in 2006 were fraudulent.

The Republican denies any wrongdoing. He said he did not touch any address, date, name or signature.

A seven-month investigation into the matter resulted in charges against day laborers Lois Mingo and Precilla Ward, who worked for an outside firm hired to collect the signatures. They were charged with felony election falsification March 1. Ward was also charged with two counts of putting false signatures on election documents. Each count is punishable by up to a year in prison.

The referendum campaign for the newly enacted ordinance was halted in August after petitions were found to have fake signatures, including those of Fidel Castro and Cincinnati Reds owner Bob Castellini.

Ohio's Equal Rights Not Special Rights collected thousands of names on petitions to have a repeal measure put to voters last November. The group voluntarily withdrew the measure when many of the signatures were deemed fake.

The phony signatures were discovered only during a second check, after a challenge by the gay rights group Restore Fairness. Prior to that challenge, the Hamilton County Board of Elections had validated more than 7,600 signatures.

## VERMONT

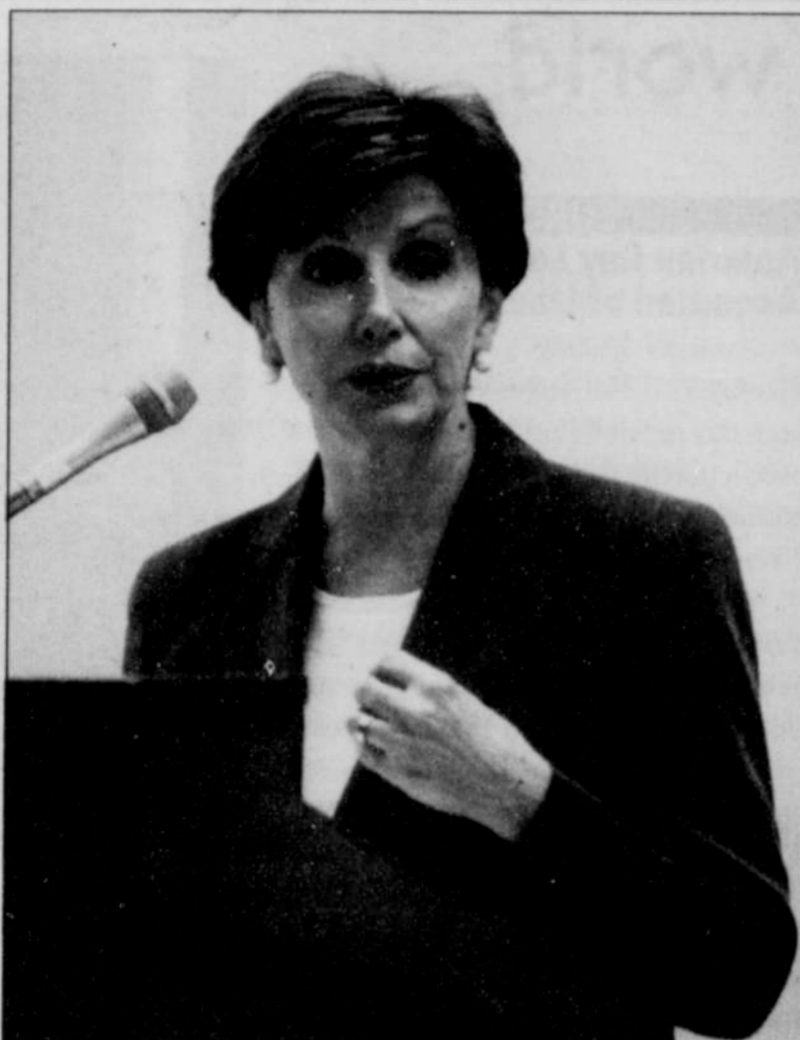
### Vermont to Study Marriage

Lawmakers in Vermont announced July 25 that a commission has been formed to gauge voters' opinions about same-sex marriage.

This comes seven years after Vermont became the first in the nation to legalize civil unions.

House Speaker Gaye Symington, D-Jericho, and Senate President Pro Tem Peter Shumlin, D-Putney, said the commission will study state laws and hold hearings throughout Vermont. It will issue a report to the Legislature in April 2008.

Shumlin reportedly said that much has changed since the civil unions law was passed and that he believed his state was ready to tackle the issue. "If I had told someone back then that just a few years



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., expects the House to vote on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act next month.

later our neighbor to the east would pass civil unions without a whimper, they would have said, 'You're crazy, Shumlin.' But that is how quickly the conversation has evolved."

Vermont is in good company with two pro-gay neighbors: New Hampshire, which approved a civil unions law this year, and Massachusetts, which became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage in 2004.

According to a poll, 42 percent of Vermont residents agree that gays and lesbians should have the right to get married, with 11 percent of voters "leaning toward that decision." The poll indicated that 37 percent disagree with same-sex marriage.

Rob Roper, chairman of the Vermont Republican Party, said the party does not have a position on same-sex marriage but thought this issue would be distracting in light of a "tax crisis."

Republican Gov. James Douglas also expressed concern that the issue would be viewed as "divisive." Democrats disagreed.

With the April deadline, lawmakers predict that same-sex marriage won't be debated until the state's 2008 election.

## WASHINGTON

### Domestic Partnership Law Begins

More than 100 gay and lesbian couples registered as domestic partners July 23 when Washington's new law went into effect.

Domestic partnerships in Washington provide 12 rights to same-sex couples including hospital visitation, the ability to authorize autopsies and organ donations, and the ability to inherit in the absence of a will. The law stops grossly short of protections provided by marriage.

To be eligible for domestic partnership, the couple must share a home, not be married or in a domestic relationship with someone else and be at least 18.

In 2006 the Washington Supreme Court upheld the state's 1998 same-sex marriage ban, which defines marriage as between one man and one woman.

Heterosexual seniors also receive benefits from the domestic partnership law. An unmarried heterosexual couple is eligible if one partner is at least 62. ☐

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