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## **Speaker and Senate President Pro Tem Announce Formation of the Vermont Commission On Family Recognition and Protection**

**Montpelier, Vermont** – July 25, 2007 - Vermont’s House and Senate leaders have created a Blue Ribbon Commission to study Vermont’s laws governing same-sex couples. Standing side by side, House Speaker Gaye Symington and Senate President Pro Tem Peter Shumlin explained that the Commission will be inviting Vermonters to speak at public hearings around the state, and will solicit input from a range of experts.

“We’ve been hearing from a lot of Vermonters who want gay couples to be treated exactly the same as heterosexual couples in our laws—that is, they believe same-sex couples should be allowed to get civil marriage licenses,” Symington explained. “It is time to ask whether it is in Vermont’s interest to continue to maintain a separate legal status for same-sex couples.” Since 2000, the State of Massachusetts, and the nations of Canada, Spain, South Africa, the Netherlands, and Belgium have opened their civil marriage laws to same-sex couples.

“So much has changed since 2000 when we created civil unions in Vermont,” Shumlin noted. “This is a good time to reopen the conversation about civil unions vs. marriage, and to hear how Vermonters feel about taking the next step to full marriage equity. A thoughtful and respectful dialogue will strengthen our state.”

The Commission consists of ten members, including two current legislators Sen. John Campbell of Windsor County and Representative Johanna Leddy-Donovan of Burlington. Tom

Little of Shelburne, an attorney and a former member of the Vermont House, will serve as chair. Other Commission members are Mary Ann Carlson of Arlington, a counselor and former State Senator; Berton R. Frye of West Danville, owner of Frye's Quarry in West Danville; Former Governor Phil Hoff of Burlington; Barbara Murphy of Johnson, President of Johnson State College; Helen Riehle of South Burlington, Executive Director of Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care, Inc. and a former State Senator; Michael Vinton of East Charleston, polygrapher and a former member of the Vermont House; and Nancy Vogele of White River Junction, an Episcopal Minister in White River Junction. The Commission is expected to complete its work and present a report to the Vermont House and Senate Judiciary Committees by the end of April, 2008.

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