

national briefs

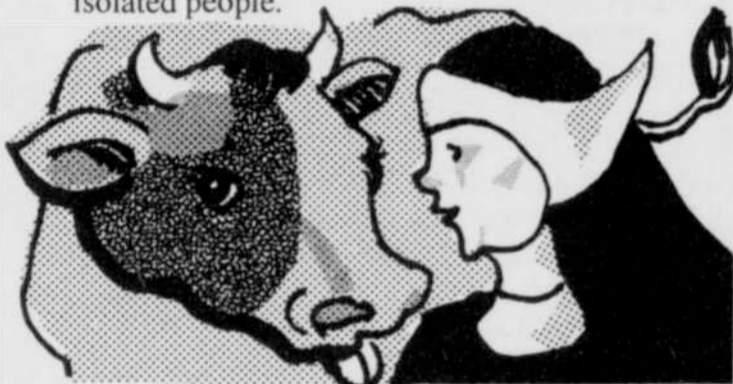
CALIFORNIA

The results, released May 6, of a telephone poll conducted by the nonpartisan Field Institute show that most Californians support laws allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly in the military and granting family rights to same-gender couples. The largest shift in opinion over the past two decades appeared in the area of child custody, where seven out of 10 people polled said they supported the rights of queer parents who are found legally fit to care for their children, reports United Press International.

Respondents were split almost evenly on the question of whether homosexual relations are morally wrong. A slight majority—56 percent—said they disapprove of same-sex marriages, and 49 percent favor a legislative ban on recognition of queer marriages performed in other states.

CYBERSPACE

The Sisters of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, an Episcopal group named for the Mother Theresa of the 13th century, inherited a herd of Black Angus from a charitable farmer in Stover, Mo., reports the *Orange County Register*. Sister Mary Elizabeth of San Juan Capistrano was sent to the small town to care for the cows and while there met a man with AIDS. Sympathy for his predicament—living in a small town with only party-line phones that was served by a doctor who visited weekly—inspired her to embark on a project to bring information about HIV/AIDS to geographically isolated people.



Selling the herd gave the sisters enough money to launch the AEGIS bulletin board in 1990. Since then, the database has shifted to the Web, acquired funding from the U.S. National Library of Medicine and grown to more than 350,000 documents, making it the world's largest database on the subject.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

On May 12, the Supreme Court refused for the second time in two years to review the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, reports United Press International. The justices declined without comment to hear the case of Lt. j.g. Richard Dirk Selland, which sought to prove that the policy violates free speech rights.

Selland was discharged from the Navy in January 1993, prior to enactment of "don't ask, don't tell," for revealing his orientation to his commander as part of a complaint about homosexual jokes made by fellow crew members. He filed suit, and a U.S. District Court ordered the Navy not to kick him out until the policy went into effect. Selland was discharged again in March 1994.

MASSACHUSETTS

Forty-one-year-old former social worker Jennifer Firestone of Cambridge has created Alternative Family Matters, a business that will provide networking and counseling services to lesbians and gay men who want to have children. According to the *Boston Globe*, the company's first catalog of New Englanders willing to be sperm donors and/or co-parents is scheduled for publication this fall.

For a \$500 fee, Alternative Family Matters produces a personal profile for the catalog, helps members clarify the type of arrangement they seek, and sponsors meetings between potential co-parents. For an additional consulting fee, Firestone will offer assistance in developing a contract governing how the child will be raised and addressing pertinent legal issues.

UTAH

It may seem ironic that Utah's state bird is the California gull, but even more ironic is biologist Michael Conover's research revealing that up to 2 percent of female California gulls get inseminated



by already-mated males and then form homosexual pairs to share nests, chick-raising responsibilities and hunting duties.

In a state known for its Bible-toting, anti-gay conservatives, this news could be contentious or anecdotal. Gayle Ruzicka, president of the conservative Eagle Forum, swallowed the idea of two single-mother birds helping each other baby-sit, reports the Salt Lake Tribune, but was nonplused when informed that the female gulls also mount each other.

Conover, who works out of Utah State University, plans to continue his research in hope of determining whether the birds' same-sex pairing is an inherited trait or learned behavior. He says the homosexual pairing occurs in species where males and females are so similar in appearance that a minor operation is required for scientists to determine their gender, so it's possible that the gulls themselves can't distinguish between the two.

VIRGINIA

The latest chapter in the Sharon Bottoms saga is an appeal to reverse part of an August ruling which granted Bottoms greater visitation rights with her son, Tyler Doustou, but stipulated that her partner, April Wade, could not be present during the visits. An American Civil Liberties Union spokesman told The Associated Press that the ruling is based on anti-gay bias and therefore violates the equal protection clause of the Constitution.

The case will be heard before the Virginia Court of Appeals, the court that gave Bottoms her only major victory in the four-year custody battle with her mother: a ruling in 1994, later overturned by the state Supreme Court, that said her sexual orientation was insufficient grounds to take her son away from her.

WASHINGTON

The Seattle School Board voted at a May 8 meeting that donated books with gay and lesbian themes must be reviewed closely before being distributed. According to United Press International, the board expressed concern about whether such books simply provided information or promoted a homosexual lifestyle.

The board also voted to investigate whether the Sexual Minority Advocacy Council, a group of school district employees, crosses the same line.

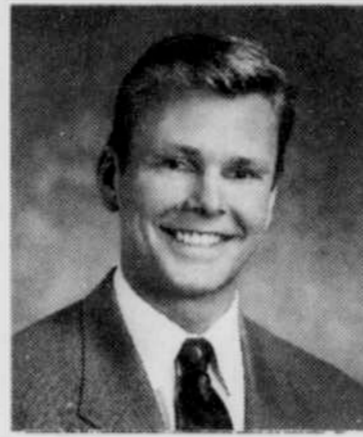


Bob Sullivan of Tacoma is suing Pierce County, alleging that authorities withheld his AIDS medication while he was in jail. According to a United Press International story, the suit maintains Sullivan's condition has worsened significantly because he was not given his medication while in jail for two days on a drunk driving and outstanding warrant charge.

Sullivan had been taking antiviral medication since December 1995 and had low levels of the virus, but since the incident the amount of HIV in his blood has increased 10-fold. His doctor confirms that the medication had stopped working for him because missing doses allowed the virus to mutate. As of May 2, authorities had declined to comment.

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