

# national briefs

## ALABAMA

A law proposed before the Alabama state Legislature that would institute a \$1,000 fine for any clergy who officiate at weddings of same-gender couples has drawn criticism from the Rev. Troy D. Perry, founder and moderator of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

"I find myself amazed that an elected official...would endorse and introduce legislation that so obviously violates the constitutional separation of church and state, and which curtails the free exercise of religion," Perry said in a news release.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Roger Bedford, has already passed the state House and has been introduced in the Senate.

## CALIFORNIA

The state Assembly on June 2 passed a bill that commands insurers and health maintenance organizations to offer clients the option of insuring same- and opposite-gender domestic partners. Carole Midgen (D-San Francisco) introduced the bill, which was heavily amended before earning enough votes—including four Republican nods—to be handed over to the California Senate.

In an attempt to avoid a gubernatorial veto, Midgen eliminated provisions calling for a state-wide domestic partnership registry system. However, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, Gov. Pete Wilson is not likely to approve the scaled-back version of the bill, which his spokesman described as "an effort to indirectly equate domestic partnership to marriage."

Meanwhile, working HIV-positive people and people with AIDS would receive state-financed drug coverage under legislation approved by the Assembly, reports United Press International. The measure, authored by Midgen, advanced to the Senate on a 72-1 vote June 3.

Advances in drug technology have enabled many people with HIV and AIDS to return to work. However, Midgen says, they may choose not to work rather than lose their Medi-Cal coverage for the expensive, life-saving drugs. She says the bill would ultimately save tax dollars by having recipients at work generating tax revenue.



Much to the chagrin of the separatist queer set, Ted Sahl was unanimously selected as the president of San Jose's Pride Celebration Committee and headed up planning for the city's June 8 Pride Parade, reports the *San Jose Mercury News*.

Sahl, 70, who describes himself as "hopelessly heterosexual," has a long history of involvement in the sexual minority community, as an activist, historical archivist, and photographer-journalist for a gay publication. He has also published a book, *Overcoming All Odds—A Photo Documentary of San Jose's Gay/Lesbian Community*.

Sahl says his interest in gay rights may stem partly from the fact that he is Jewish, and has experienced discrimination firsthand. He also has a close relative who is gay. But in part it was a twist of fate: He photographed a gay and lesbian protest rally in San Jose in 1978, and sold his photos to a local gay newspaper, the *Lambda News*. He ended up with a job at the paper, and began a life-long interest and involvement in the gay-rights movement.

## CYBERSPACE

Since September 1995, Sister Mary Elizabeth of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., had been allowed to use articles from Reuters news wire service on her Web site, AEGIS, AIDS Education Global Infor-

mation System ([www.aegis.com](http://www.aegis.com)). The site is the largest electronic HIV/AIDS information clearinghouse in the world. But according to a CP Communications report, in early May Sister Mary Elizabeth was asked by the wire service to stop posting Reuters articles and to remove them from the archives.

"The days of people sharing this information charitably seem to be waning," said David Fair, an organizer of the Critical Path AIDS Project ([www.critpath.org](http://www.critpath.org)). Fair is among those promoting an international e-mail campaign to pressure Reuters into reversing its decision. For more information about the campaign, point your Web browser at [www.smartlink.net/~martinjh](http://www.smartlink.net/~martinjh).

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Pundits are anticipating a proposal by the Clinton administration to expand Medicaid to cover treatment of low-income, HIV-positive asymptomatic people. The *New York Times* reports that the White House would not need congressional approval for such a change, saying that the Department of Health and Human Services will use state demonstration projects to assess whether Medicaid eligibility in the early stages of HIV infection is effective in reducing the costs of care.

The federal government and states will spend more than \$170 billion on Medicaid this year. Despite the high price tag for antiviral therapy, federal officials believe that early treatment would lower the long-term health care costs associated with the disease.

The government estimates that about half the 217,000 U.S. citizens with AIDS will be on Medicaid at some point.

## FLORIDA

Florida authorities have arrested the alleged leaders of a so-called computer "gang" that accused, via the World Wide Web, a Lecanto high school teacher of having a homosexual affair with a student. United Press International reports that state anti-gang laws are being used to prosecute Ryan Vella and Christopher Cohen, both 19. The two are charged with publication of material that exposes a person to hatred, contempt or ridicule. The offense would normally be considered a first-degree misdemeanor, but because the suspects operated in a gang they are facing third-degree felony charges.

The Web site, which displayed a doctored prom picture with the teacher's head superimposed over the student's female date, included the home phone numbers of both the teacher and student, as well as a recorded message saying that the teacher "must die." This is not the first time the teacher has been the target of an attack: In December, a former student was sentenced to six months probation in connection with a harassment incident.

## MASSACHUSETTS

A Boston-area advertising campaign kicked off May 20 is the first in the nation, according to local health officials, to focus on increased access to health care for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities. United Press International reported that the "Deserve the Same Care" campaign would continue through the first week of June, the state's sexual minority Pride week.

The ads were inspired by a 1996 study which indicated that many young homosexuals do not disclose their sexual orientation to health care providers, thereby limiting the provider's ability to understand factors affecting the patient's health and to prescribe appropriate treatment.



Compiled by Christopher D. Cuttone

## Celebrating 18 Years of Service to Our Community



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