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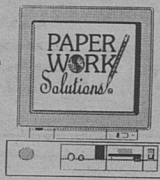
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National News

Etheridge and Cypher Celebrate Birth

Rock singer Melissa Etheridge and her partner Julie Cypher announced the birth of their first daughter, Bailey Jean, at 1:35 a.m. on February 10. Cypher had carried the child, which weighed in at 8 lbs. 10 oz. at birth.

Meanwhile, Etheridge has filed a lawsuit against a previous tour manager. In addition to filing for a restraining order, the singer has also requested half a million dollars in damages.

The suit stems from an agreement of confidentiality made between Etheridge and her manager. At press time, there have been no leads as to the nature of that agreement, though many speculate that the controversy may involve knowledge of the identity of the child's biological father.

Previous speculation about the birth father had focused for a short time on Brad Pitt, who is known to be a close friend of Etheridge and Cypher. Those looking for hints in the child's name might find themselves somewhat stunned by other celebrity possibilities. After all, Bailey Jean does sound a lot like "Billie Jean," one of the best-selling songs by pop singer Michael Jackson...

Lesbian and Gay Man Honored in King Day Parade

The National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum (NBGLLF) held the spotlight in Atlanta this year during the city's annual celebration of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Dr. Sylvia Rhue, a sexuality expert with the Forum, and Keith Boykin, Executive Director of NBGLLF, were chosen as Grand Marshals for the U.S. King Day parade. They stood alongside Coretta Scott King, the widow of the world-famous champion of civil rights and class activism.

"None of us is free as long as lesbians and gays can be legally fired from

their jobs in 41 states in the nation," declared Boykin before a rally outside the King Center. Thousands had gathered there to commemorate the holiday.

United Fight Delayed

Local United Airlines employees have been closely watching the controversy unfolding between their company and the city of San Francisco, which recently passed a law requiring all contractors with the city to offer domestic partnership benefits to their employees. As the world's largest airline, United would be forced to offer such benefits to all of its 86,000 employees worldwide.

After weeks of sometimes heated discussion, the city has agreed to offer United a short-term lease of 20 months, thereby temporarily exempting the airline from the new law. United has agreed to look into instituting domestic partnerships during that period, after which the city will consider renewing the lease for another 23 years.

The debate between the air carrier and the city has stirred up a number of questions around San Francisco's progressive new law, which goes into effect on June 1. One major issue was the fact that most of the airline's employees live well outside of the Bay Area, as do many of the customers flying in and out of the city airport. The Catholic Church also got involved in the discussion and challenged the new law on the grounds of morality.

United has been investigating domestic partnerships for its U.S. employees, and has already offered them to employees residing in countries which require such benefits. Two of the airline's unions, the Association of Flight Attendants and the International Association of Machinists, have already supported the move, along with the gay and lesbian group United at United. The Airline Pilots' Association is expected to take a similar stance soon.

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