

BRIEFS
NATION**Study: Hormone patches less dangerous pills**

For women who have struggled with the symptoms of menopause but are fearful of taking risky hormone pills, there is at last a bit of hope.

Hormone skin patches and gels, it seems, are far less likely than pills to cause dangerous blood clots. At least that was the finding from a recently published French study.

Patches and gels are already known to be effective for relieving the hot flashes and sleep-interrupting night sweats that plague many women. No one knows whether they will prove safer than pills in terms of breast cancer, heart attack or stroke risk. A large study currently under way may answer that.

But if they do, it may soften some of the backlash against hormones since a landmark study in 2002 frightened many women away from their use. Critics of that study have long contended that it is the type of estrogen or progestin, the dosage, and the method of taking the hormones that may affect the health risks.

NEW YORK

Genealogists reveal truth about Sharpton's family

The Rev. Al Sharpton is a descendant of a slave owned by relatives of the late Sen. Strom Thurmond, a discovery the civil rights activist called shocking on Sunday.



SHARPTON

Sharpton learned of his connection to Thurmond, once a prominent defender of segregation, last week through the New York Daily News, which asked genealogists to trace his roots.

"It was probably the most shocking thing in my life," Sharpton said at a news conference Sunday, the same day the tabloid revealed the story.

Some of Thurmond's relatives said the nexus also came as a surprise to them. Doris Strom Costner, a distant cousin who said she knew the late senator all her life, said Sunday she "never heard of such a thing."

"My momma never would talk to me about nothing like that," Costner said of ancestors who owned slaves. "She only talked to me about good things."

WASHINGTON

Forecasters expect little economy growth in 2007

Restrained by a worse-than-expected slump in housing, the economy will grow at the slowest pace in five years in 2007, leading economic forecasters say. They predict consumers will get a break on inflation from falling energy prices.

The survey of 47 top forecasters, released Monday by the National Association for Business Economics, found a greater expected impact from the ailing housing market this year than did the previous forecast in November. Stronger consumer spending will help offset the housing drag, according to the survey.

The panel predicted that the overall economy will grow by 2.7 percent this year. It would be slowest annual increase in the gross domestic product since a 1.6 percent rise in 2002, when the economy was pulling out of the most recent recession. In 2006, the GDP rose by 3.4 percent.

GDP measures the value of all goods and services produced in the United States. It is the broadest gauge of the country's economic health.

THE WAR IN IRAQ
Bombs kill 41 in Baghdad**Militia leader: Crackdown doomed to fail**By BRIAN MURPHY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**BAGHDAD, Iraq**

A female suicide bomber triggered a ball bearing-packed charge Sunday, killing at least 41 people at a mostly Shiite college whose main gate was left littered with blood-soaked student notebooks and papers amid the bodies.

Witnesses said a woman carried out the attack at the business school annex to Mustansiriya University. Interior Ministry officials said they were still investigating those reports. The school's main campus was hit by a string of bombings last month that killed 70 people.

The attack came as the powerful Shiite militia leader Muqtada al-Sadr said an ongoing security crackdown in Baghdad was doomed to fail because of U.S. involvement and suggested he was rethinking his cooperation. He bitterly complained that car bombs continue to explode in the capital despite the new security push.

The political situation in Iraq was further thrown into question after President Jalal Talabani, a 73-year-old Kurd, was taken to Jordan for medical tests after feeling ill. Talabani's son, Qubad Talabani, said his father was suffering from fatigue and exhaustion. "He did not have a heart attack" or a stroke, he told CNN.

The statement issued in the name of the radical cleric al-Sadr put increased strains on the U.S.-Iraqi security sweeps aimed at restoring order in the capital.

Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia pulled its fighters off the streets under intense government pressure to let the 12-day-old security plan proceed. But a relentless wave of Sunni attacks — six alone in the Baghdad area Sunday — has apparently tested the patience of al-Sadr as well as many ordinary Shiites.



Firefighters try to extinguish flames after a car bomb explosion in Baghdad, Iraq, on Sunday. The blast killed at least one person and injured four.

AP PHOTOS

Rice: Bush will defy withdrawal legislationBy HOPE YEN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**WASHINGTON**

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged the Democratic-controlled Congress not to interfere in the conduct of the Iraq war and suggested President Bush would defy troop withdrawal legislation.

But Sen. Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said lawmakers would step up efforts to force Bush to change course. "The president needs a check and a



RICE

balance," said Levin, D-Mich.

Rice said proposals being drafted by Senate Democrats to limit the war amounted to "the worst of micromanagement of military affairs." She said military leaders such as Gen. David Petraeus, the new U.S. commander in Iraq, believe the president's plan to send more troops is necessary.

"I can't imagine a circumstance in which it's a good thing that their flexibility is constrained by people sitting here in Washington, sitting in the Congress," Rice said. She was asked in a broadcast interview whether Bush would feel bound by legislation seeking to withdraw combat troops within 120 days.

"The president is going to, as commander in chief, need to do what the country needs done," she said.

The Senate Democrats' legislation would try to limit the mission of U.S. troops in Iraq by revoking Congress' 2002 vote authorizing Bush's use of force against Saddam Hussein.

One draft version supported by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., would pull out combat forces by March of next year and restrict U.S. troops to fighting al-Qaida terrorists, training the Iraqi security forces and maintaining Iraq's borders.

Democrats have acknowledged that the proposal does not yet have enough votes to overcome GOP procedural obstacles and a veto by Bush. But they are hoping the latest effort will draw enough GOP support to embarrass the president and keep the pressure on.

Soldiers, vets of Iraq war not getting mental help needed to recoverBy SETH BORENSTEIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**WASHINGTON**

Many Iraq war soldiers, veterans and their families are not getting needed psychological help because a stressed military's mental health system is overwhelmed and understaffed, a task force of psychologists found.

The panel's 67-page report calls for the immediate strengthening of the military mental health system. It cites a 40 percent vacancy rate in active duty psychologists in the Army and

Navy, resources diverted from family counselors and a weak transition for veterans leaving the military.

The findings were released Sunday by the American Psychological Association.

More than three out of 10 soldiers met the criteria for a "mental disorder," but far less than half of those in need sought help, the report found. Sometimes that's because of the stigma of having mental health problems, other times the help simply wasn't available, according to the task force. And there are special difficulties in

getting help to National Guard and Reserve troops, who have been used heavily in Iraq, the report said.

The special task force found no evidence of a well-coordinated or well-disseminated approach to providing behavioral health care to service members and their families.

The psychology task force, chaired by an active military psychologist and comprised of psychologists working for the military or Veterans Administration, said relatively few high-quality mental health programs exist in the military now.

"There are tremendous needs; the system is stressed by these needs," said pediatric psychologist Jeanne Hoffman, a task force member and a civilian pediatric psychologist at Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu.

The Defense Department's mental health experts hadn't read the report. Pentagon spokeswoman Cynthia Smith said the military is proud of its mental health services record, including a new program this year that checks up on service members after they return home to their families.

Welfare state growing despite overhaulsBy STEPHEN OHLEMACHER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**WASHINGTON**

The welfare state is bigger than ever despite a decade of policies designed to wean low-income individuals from public aid.

The number of families receiving cash benefits from welfare has plummeted since the government imposed time limits on the payments a decade ago. But other programs for the poor, including Medicaid, food stamps and disability benefits, are bursting with new enrollees.

The result, according to an Associated Press analysis: Nearly one in six people rely on some form of public assistance, a large

er share than at any time since the government started measuring two decades ago.

Critics of the welfare overhaul say the numbers offer fresh evidence that few former recipients have become self-sufficient, even though millions have moved from welfare to work. They say the vast majority have been forced into low-paying jobs without benefits and few opportunities to advance.

"If the goal of welfare reform was to get people off the welfare rolls, bravo," said Vivyan Adair, a former welfare recipient who is now an assistant professor of women's studies at Hamilton College in upstate New York. "If the goal was to reduce poverty and give people economic and job

stability, it was not a success."

Proponents of the changes in welfare say programs that once discouraged work now offer support to people in low-paying jobs. They point to expanded eligibility rules for food stamps and Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor, that enable people to keep getting benefits even after they start working.

"I don't have any problems with those programs growing, and indeed, they were intended to grow," said Ron Haskins, a former adviser to President Bush on welfare policy.

"We've taken the step of getting way more people into the labor force and they have taken a huge step toward self-sufficiency. What

is the other choice?" he asked.

In the early 1990s, critics contended the welfare system encouraged unemployment and promoted single-parent families. Welfare recipients, mostly single mothers, could lose benefits if they earned too much money or if they lived with the father of their children.

Major changes in welfare were enacted in 1996, requiring most recipients to work but allowing them to continue some benefits after they started jobs.

The law imposed a five-year limit on cash payments for most people in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, or TANF. Some states have shorter time limits.

AT A GLANCE

Significant milestones in the evolution of the U.S. welfare state:

1935: President Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act, providing incomes to retired workers age 65 and older.

1961: President Kennedy signs an executive order creating a pilot food stamp program.

1964: President Johnson signs the Food Stamp Act, making the program permanent.

1965: President Johnson signs the law that created Medicare and Medicaid.

1972: President Nixon signs the law creating Supplemental Security Income, which provides benefits to low-income disabled people.

1996: President Clinton signs the welfare overhaul law, limiting cash welfare benefits for most recipients to five years. Some states enact shorter time limits.

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