Going out with bang
Hester's 2 long TDs spark Bears

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A push to unleash consumer agency
Recall scares spur Congress to sharpen watchdog's teeth.

By Jim Tankersley and Maurice Possley
Tribune staff reporters

WASHINGTON — A year of recalls and lead scares in the toy industry is spurring Congress toward the largest overhaul in decades of the nation's product safety watchdog.

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Reins to go to Bhutto son
19-year-old's controversial father to run party first

By Kim Barker
Tribune foreign correspondent

KARACHI, Pakistan — The 19-year-old son of assassinated Pakistani politician Benazir Bhutto was named symbolic leader of the country's largest opposition political party Sunday, extending his family's dynasty but leaving major questions over its role in the fight for democracy there.

Bhutto's son, a student at Oxford University who has not lived in his native land since he was 10, changed his name to Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Sunday. He will play only a ceremonial role until he graduates from college, leaving his controversial father, Asif Ali Zardari, to run the party until his son is ready.

The party also announced that it would compete in coming elections, which are scheduled for Jan. 8 but appear likely to be postponed by the government.

Critics said the decision to keep power in the hands of Bhutto's family misses an opportunity for the party—which says it represents the will of the common people—to introduce democracy into its own system. Some say the party should have gone outside the family to find potential leaders and welcome new blood from different regions.

Dark energy—it's gravity's worst enemy and the hottest mystery in science.

Now a giant telescope at the South Pole could help us learn more.
Michael Slatton, a retired Army Ranger and 30-year smoker, tried to quit cigarettes by going cold turkey.

It didn’t work.

Eager to succeed the next time, Slatton enrolled in a clinical trial at the University of Chicago. He doesn’t know if he is receiving the experimental drug or a placebo, but all participants get counseling and nicotine patches. Slatton, of the city’s Woodlawn neighborhood, is confident he took his last drag from a Kool in June. Each study subject participates for a year.

Experts on smoking cessation are not surprised Slatton’s first try failed. Although many people trying to quit choose the “white knuckle” approach, that method has the lowest success rate. Most smokers, they say, need more than willpower:

“Some people can just make the decision and quit,” said Andrea King, director of the clinical addictions research lab at the U. of C. “Other people need more support, need to make more attempts or need more comprehensive treatment.”

With a new state law taking effect Tuesday that prohibits smoking in most public buildings, health experts are hoping...
Black smoking rate tied to menthols, data show

Smoking rates in Chicago and nationwide currently hover at about 21 percent, down by half from 1965, federal statistics show.

Yet smoking among African-Americans rose in 2006, to 23 percent from 21 percent.

In North Lawndale and some other parts of Chicago, as many as 39 percent of African-American adults smoke, said Joseph West, an epidemiologist who works with a community-based smoking cessation program at Sinai Urban Health Institute.

"Three decades have gone by and the smoking rate in this community hasn't changed," West said.

Smoking patterns could help explain why rates among African-Americans tend to be higher, said Pebbles Fagan of the National Cancer Institute.

More than three-quarters of white people smoke non-menthol cigarettes, and typically they light up for the first time when they are under age.

African-Americans usually begin when they are adults, and three-quarters smoke ever because of menthol brands, government data show.

Some studies have found that menthol cigarettes contain higher levels of tar and nicotine. Menthol also has been shown to lower the body's ability to metabolize nicotine, which results in greater exposure.

When West does intervention work in black neighborhoods, he said, people often tell him they want to quit but can't afford prescription medications and treatments such as patches.

But individual cigarettes, or "loosies," are readily available for 50 cents.

West said more of the state's tobacco settlement money should be directed to poor communities.

"We need to begin to look at where we spend those tobacco revenues in terms of investing in young people and communities," he said.

Deborah L. Shelton