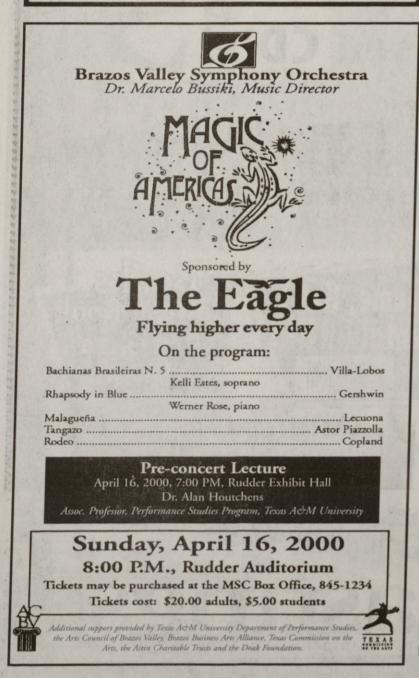
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Latino policy unfair

WASHINGTON (AP) — Policymakers must address the health care disparities affecting the Hispanic community, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus said Thursday.

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Latinos represent a disproportionate share of the nation's uninsured and are likelier to be hit by diabetes and other illnesses, the caucus said in a report issued Thursday.

The caucus called for improved Hispanic access to health care, more funding for organizations that do Latino health care outreach, increased representation in the health care profession and better data collection.

"Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the United States, and it is expected that by the year 2025, Latinos will constitute approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population," said caucus Chairwoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif.

Hispanics account for 35 percent of the nation's uninsured even though they comprise just 11 percent of the population. Nearly three-quarters of those uninsured Latinos live in just four states - California, Texas, New York and Florida.

In Texas, which leads the percentage of uninsured residents, 45 percent of the state's Hispanics say they had no health insurance, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported last month.

Part of the problem, said Rep. Ciro Rodriguez, D-San Antonio, is that Hispanic working families "are concentrated in low-wage jobs and small firms that are least likely to offer health insurance.

Rodriguez said caucus members will introduce legislation that would provide incentives for businesses to provide health coverage for low-wage workers, expand the Children's Health Insurance Program to include parents, and provide coverage for low-income legal immigrant women and children.

Museum wing ope

The Louvre goes primitive Paris's Louvre Museum opened a new wing Thursday, that has very first collection of primitive art objects.



Russian communists against START

MOSCOW (AP) - Despite protests from hard-liners, Russia's parliament began work Thursday on approving the long-stalled START II treaty, which would clear the way for huge cuts in the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals

The lower house of parliament, the State Duma, went into a closed session for briefings from Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Defense Ministry Igor Sergeyev. They urged lawmakers to pass the treaty when it comes up for a vote on Friday.

START II would halve U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals to about 3,000-3,500 warheads each by the end of 2007

The Duma is expected to approve the treaty, which was ratified by the U.S. Senate in 1996. Centrist parties gained a majority in the Duma in elections in December, ending years of control by the Communists and their hard-line allies.

"Many understand the need for ratification," Sergeyev said after the session. "Communists will probably vote against, but there is no evidence or arguments to convince one that ratification would fail.'

President Vladimir Putin, who won elections in March, has urged the Duma to approve START II. Putin through a missile-defense system in a retaliat has balanced his call to restore Russia as a great power with a pragmatic policy of preserving good relations with the West.

The Communists have called the START II treaty a disgrace, warning it would weaken Russia and give the United States military superiority.

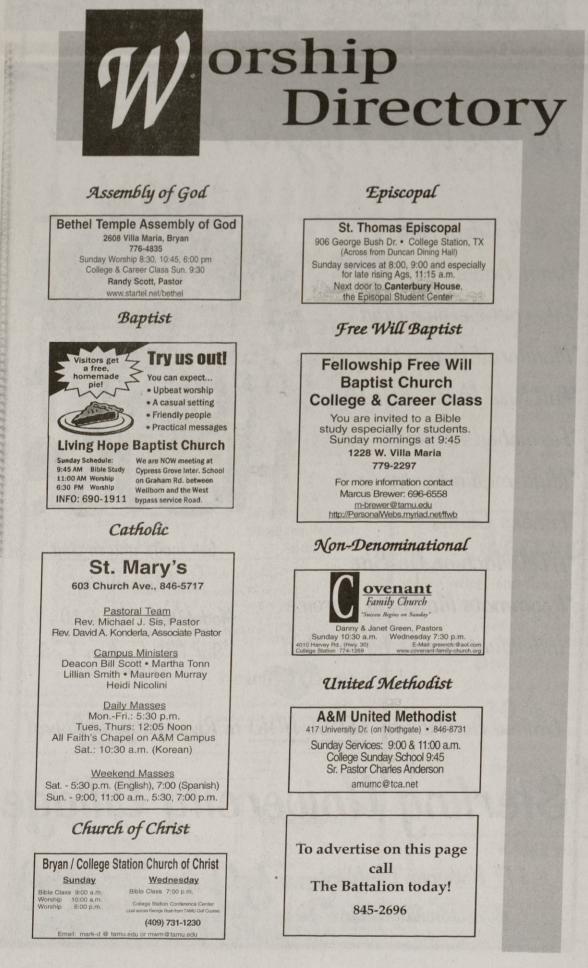
But Russian supporters of START II say many Russian strategic missiles are past their service lifetime and will have to be scrapped soon anyway. Short of everything from new weapons to uniforms, the Russian military is in a shambles and the government cannot afford massive new military spending.

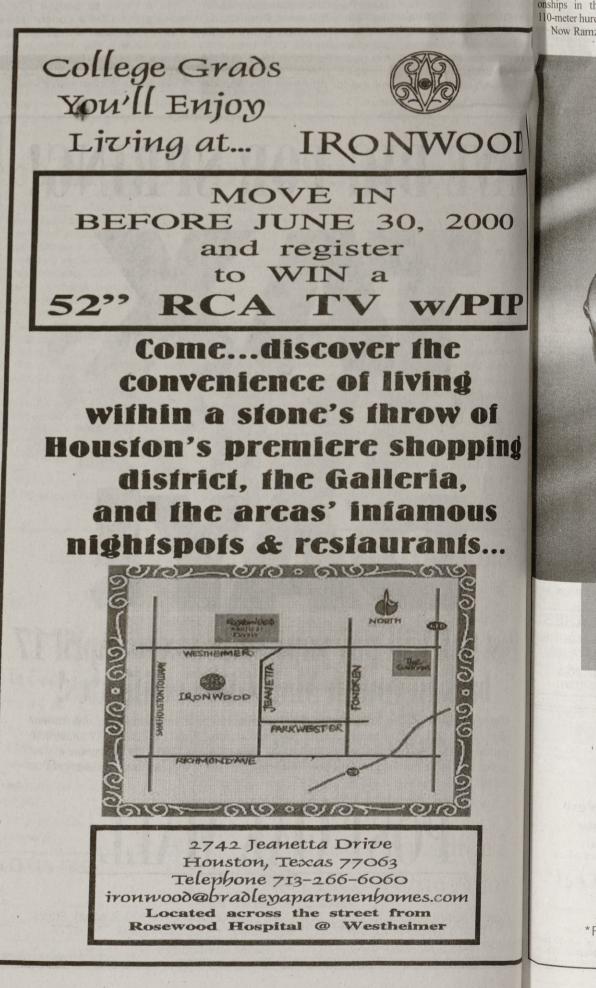
The government and centrist lawmakes country's nuclear program should shift to des smaller arsenal of modern weapons, such as new Topol-M missile.

"A few modern missiles, capable of h would be a much more effective deterrent," en maker Andrei Kokoshin said.

Ratifying the long-delayed treaty would read irritant in U.S.-Russian relations but would not a growing dispute over Washington's call tom Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Washington wants to change the 1972 ABI n so it can build a limited missile-defense system tect against possible missile attacks from "net tions" such as North Korea. But Russia saysis could trigger a new arms race. It opposes anyd the ABM treaty.





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