

Study could lead to breakthrough in fight against sickle cell disease

By Janet McConaughy
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A rare, deadly lung condition so common among people with sickle cell anemia that testing for and treating it could help many patients live longer, healthier lives, a study found. Experts called the study a major advance in the fight against sickle cell disease, an inherited blood disorder that affects 70,000 to 100,000 Americans. "The paper will change the standard of care for sickle cell patients across the country," said Dr. Clint Joiner, director of the sickle cell center at the

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

One-third of sickle cell patients have the lung condition, which makes them 10 times more likely to die within 18 months, doctors at the National Institutes of Health and Howard University reported in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine.

Doctors must now find the best ways to treat sickle cell patients who also have pulmonary hypertension, or high blood pressure in the lungs. It is a condition in which narrowed, thickened blood vessels in the lungs keep the body from getting enough oxygen.

Researchers do not know if pulmonary hypertension caused the increase in deaths among the 195 patients they studied, or was a sign of severe sickle cell disease. But it was present in 63 patients, or 32 percent.

All 195 were in stable condition at the start. Within 18 months, nearly 20 percent of those with both conditions were dead, compared to fewer than 2 percent of those without pulmonary hypertension.

The numbers indicate that patients with sickle cell disease should be tested for pulmonary hypertension, said Dr. Mark T. Gladwin lead researcher for the study.

Bush urges ban on gay marriages

By Jennifer Loven
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Bush wants quick election-year enactment of a constitutional amendment prohibiting gays from marrying each other, but Republicans in Congress are not rushing to heed his call.

After Bush's announcement Tuesday, House Majority Leader Jim DeLay, R-Texas, said it would take time to gauge the level of support in Congress for a constitutional amendment. He suggested the difficulty of passage may cause lawmakers to take a different approach to preserving marriage as a solely man-woman union.

"We don't want to do this in haste," DeLay said.

The front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, and his leading rival, Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina, struggled to make their opposition to Bush's stance clear as they carefully tiptoed around politically sensitive turf.

Kerry said he supports civil unions, "and I think that that is permissible within state law and ought to be."

"If we are to prevent the meaning of marriage from being changed forever, our nation must enact a constitutional amendment to protect marriage in America."

— George W. Bush
 President

"If he really wants to help married couples, what he should be doing is helping them resolve their economic problems, their health care problems," Edwards said while campaigning in Georgia.

Meeting long-held expectations of his most conservative supporters, Bush argued that same-sex weddings threaten the institution of marriage — and thus society — and that actions by several jurisdictions allowing gay marriage make federal intervention the only recourse.

"If we are to prevent the meaning of marriage from being changed forever, our nation must enact a constitutional amendment to protect marriage in America," the president said. "Marriage cannot be severed from its cultural, religious and moral roots without weakening the good influence of society."



Bush called on Congress "to promptly pass and to send to the states for ratification" an amendment to define marriage as a union of a man and a woman. He had opposed legalizing civil unions as governor of Texas, but Bush left the door open for states to do so now — an alternative gay rights groups had insufficient.

A majority of Americans — sometimes by as much as a 2-1 margin — oppose legalizing gay marriages.

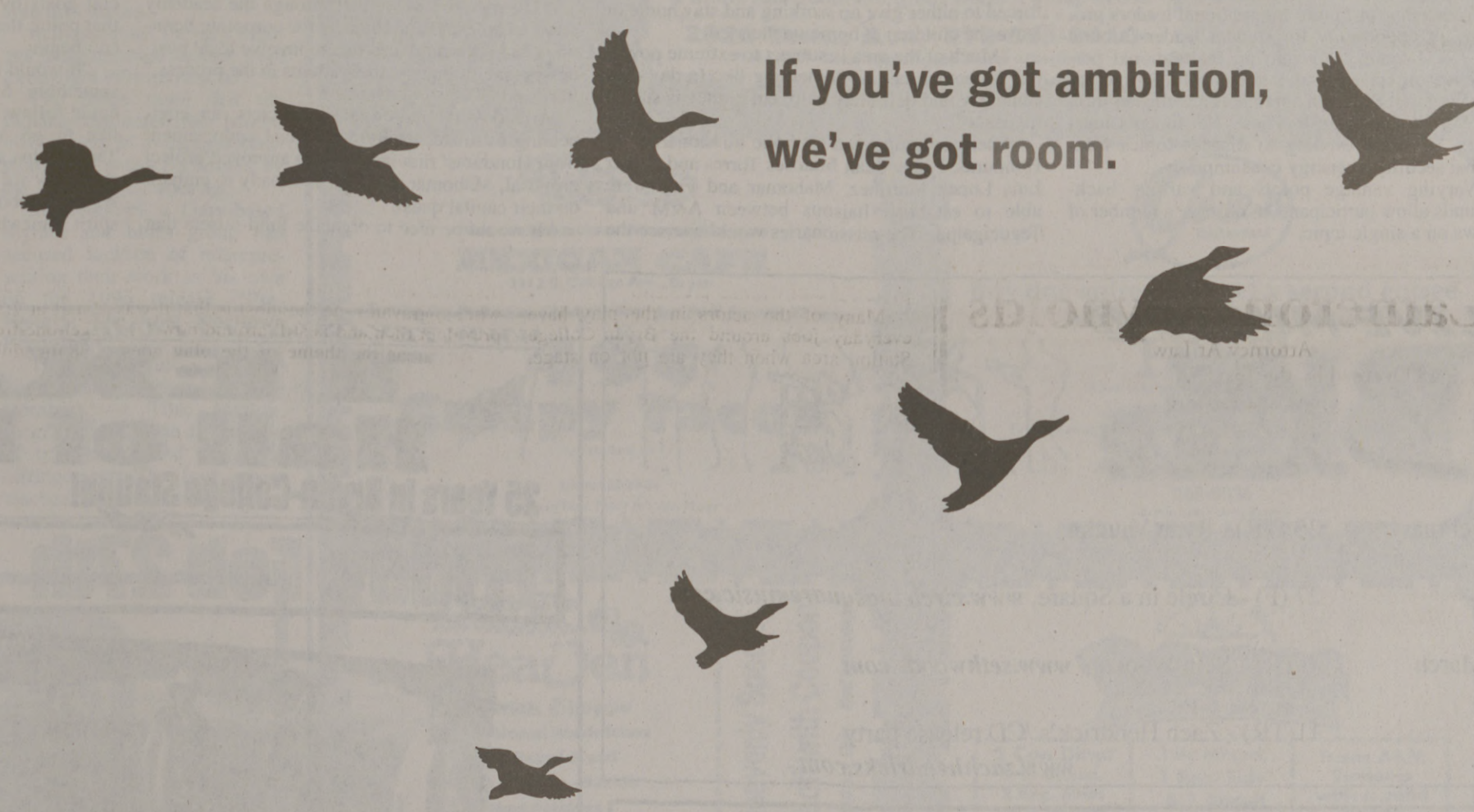
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