




Today	Saturday	Sunday
		
High: 52 Low: 40 Precip: 80%	High: 51 Low: 37 Precip: 80%	High: 55 Low: 36 Precip: 20%

IN BRIEF

Lawmakers look to tax facelifts; fabulous cry foul

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Nip, tuck and ... tax?

Lawmakers trying to plump up the bottom line are considering a "vanity tax" on cosmetic surgery and Botox injections in Washington, Illinois and other states.

Plastic surgeons and their patients say the idea is just plain ugly.

"It makes no sense. Where does it stop — massages, facials, teeth cleanings?" asked Karen Wakefield, 51, who has had a nose job, dermabrasion, liposuction, tummy tuck and breast lift, plus a little Botox here and there.

"Even having a baby is elective surgery," added Wakefield, an event planner in Woodinville, Wash. "Why not tax that, too?"

The Washington state senator who proposed the tax said she has never gone under the knife for beauty, but wouldn't rule it out.

"I, too, look in the mirror and see my mother," said Seattle Democrat Karen Keiser, 57. But she thinks cosmetic surgery patients can afford the state's 6.5 percent sales tax. She wants to earmark the money for poor

children's health insurance.

"We could do Botox-for-babies parties. It might be the new thing," Keiser said. "Anyone who can afford the money for cosmetic procedures, I don't think they would be deterred by a little sales tax. You pay it on your lipstick."

The tax would not apply to reconstructive surgery for, say, burn victims or women who have undergone mastectomies.

In September, New Jersey became the first and so far the only state to tax plastic surgery, at 6 percent. The tax is projected to bring in \$25 million a year.

In Illinois, the state comptroller has proposed a 6 percent tax on cosmetic surgery to create a stem cell research institute. If the Legislature approves, the question could be put to the voters in 2006.

In California, the very capital of cosmetic surgery, such procedures are tax-free.

The cosmetic surgery tax is a cousin to the "sin taxes" many states slap on drinking, smoking and gambling during tough budget times.

"In this anti-tax climate, these user-based, selective tax proposals are more palatable than broader ones," said Bert Waisaner, tax policy analyst for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons frowns on this new wrinkle, calling New Jersey's law a "dangerous precedent."

Seattle surgeon Dr. Phil Haeck noted that 86 percent of cosmetic surgery patients are women.

— The Associated Press

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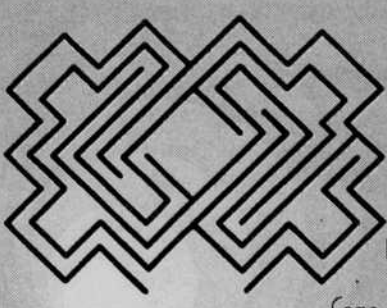


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Palestinian leader bans people from carrying weapons

BY MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RAMALLAH, West Bank — The new Palestinian leadership on Thursday banned civilians from carrying weapons and indicated it will appoint a new security minister known for his tough stance against militants — clear signs of seriousness about reining in violence, an Israeli precondition for peace talks.

The Palestinians came in for praise from Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who said Thursday that conditions are right for a breakthrough toward peace.

Before the weapons ban was announced, Sharon said he was "very satisfied" with the actions of new Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, who has been pressing hard for a declaration by militant groups of a halt to attacks against Israel, ending four years of bloody violence. For now, the militants have agreed to a temporary suspension of violence to test Israel's response.

Also Thursday, Palestinian police prepared to deploy in central and southern Gaza to stop militants from attacking Israelis. The new deployment was set for Friday morning, Palestinian officials said.

In local elections in 10 localities in Gaza on Thursday, meanwhile, the Islamic Hamas movement scored some big victories, according to exit polls, handily defeating Abbas' Fatah party in three of the four communities polled. The Hamas victories reflected widespread support in Gaza for the violent Islamic movement, which provides welfare, schools and kindergartens to residents, alongside its attacks against Israel.

The decree banning Palestinian civilians from holding weapons was

a gesture toward Israel and the United States, which have long demanded the disarming of militant groups responsible for attacks that have killed more than 1,000 Israelis. It also sent a message to Palestinians that the Abbas regime will be based on law and order, and that police will not allow militants to strut in public with their weapons.

The decree, issued by Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia, emphasized the law and order issue, noting "the increase in the number of violent crimes in all the governates because of the chaos of weapons."


Soon after the violence started in September 2000, Israel targeted Palestinian police posts for destruction in response to allegations they were involved in violence. The Israelis declared they would open fire on any armed Palestinian — in effect disarming the police.

The main result was to weaken the authority of the Palestinian police forces. The vacuum was filled by large militant groups, like Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, as well as small armed gangs who ruled neighborhoods by force of arms, often clashing among themselves.

The northern West Bank town of Jenin is a well-known center of militant groups and gangs, and police have no authority there. Residents say they live in fear.

"I feel insecure with guns in the hands of the people on the street," said Wissam Asaadi, 40. "I am worried about the security of my children and my home," he said. "For me, personal safety is more important than the national goals" of an end to the occupation and creation of a Palestinian state.

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