

# Taxpayers provide marijuana for patients

► The same agencies that rally against legalization of marijuana for medicinal uses, provide joints as "compassionate use."

(AP) - The small silver canister that looks like a cookie tin arrives promptly once a month for Florida stockbroker Irvin Rosenfeld.

Its contents: 300 tightly rolled marijuana joints.

His supplier: the U.S. government.

"The quality is satisfactory," Rosenfeld says appreciatively. "And I don't have to buy it on the street."

The 44-year-old suffers from a rare bone disease and is one of eight people legally supplied with marijuana under the government's longstanding "compassionate use" program.

It is run by the same health and drug agencies that condemn marijuana as part of the national war on

drugs. And this fall, top government officials from those agencies campaigned against ballot measures in California and Arizona to legalize marijuana for medical purposes. The issues passed in both states, although the courts likely will determine their fate.

"Research shows that marijuana is harmful to one's brain, heart, lungs and immune system," wrote Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala in a recent statement. "Any law premised on the notion that marijuana or these other illicit drugs are medically useful is suspect."

So why does the government continue supplying it?

"When we have a compassion-

ate-use situation, out of feeling for the patient, we don't take that away," says Don McLearn, a spokesman for the Food and Drug Administration. "We just don't add to it."

The federal marijuana program started in the 1970s and was discontinued in 1992 — partly because of a huge increase in applications from AIDS patients. The 13 people already receiving monthly pot shipments were allowed to continue. Five have since died. The others will be supplied — at taxpayer expense — for as long as they want.

They suffer from cancer, glaucoma, multiple sclerosis and rare genetic diseases.

Marijuana, they say, helps con-

trol nausea and muscle spasms, ease eye pressure and pain, and stimulate appetites. Pot patients insist it works better than other drugs, including the highly expensive Marinol, a pill form of marijuana that has the same active ingredient, THC.

"We are sick people. We are desperate people," says Elvy Musikka of Florida, who has glaucoma and carries her daily ration of marijuana "brownies" in her pocketbook. She bakes them from the 300 joints the National Institute on Drug Abuse sends her every month.

"This medicine gives us quality of life."

The government crop is harvested on a 7.5-acre pot farm at the Re-

search Institute of Pharmacology at the University of Mississippi. From there, the marijuana is shipped by airplane to North Carolina, where the cigarettes are packed by machine, and delivered to medical centers to pick up the eight patients to pick up

The entire operation costs \$200,000 a year.

It's a tiny — but thorny — program, and its administration is shared by the Department of Health and Human Services; the National Institute on Drug Abuse, which acts as the

and the Drug Enforcement Administration, which must approve the use of controlled substances.

## New tests planned for drug

Memory medicine may improve life for Alzheimer's patients

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new drug, which in some tests of healthy elderly men restores memory almost to that of young people, soon will be tested on patients with Alzheimer's, the fatal brain disorder that destroys the mind.

Dr. Gary Lynch of the University of California at Irvine said Sunday the drug called ampakine CX-516 accelerates signals between brain cells and appears to significantly sharpen the memory.

The drug, used in only mild doses, was tested on students in their early 20s and on men aged 65 to 70 and the results were "particularly striking" among the older people, Lynch said. He delivered a report on the drug Sunday at a national meeting of the Society for Neuroscience.

Lynch said clinical trials of the drug consisted of memory tests conducted with and without CX-516.

Before taking the drugs, the subjects were read a series of nonsense syllables, then asked

five minutes later to recall as many of them as possible.

The elderly could recall, on average, only one of the syllables. The score for the young men averaged four out of 10.

The subjects later were given mild doses of ampakine CX-516, then retested.

"The results for the 65- to 70-year-old men was particularly striking," said Lynch. "They scored near the range of young people."

In some tests even the young experienced improvement in memory by about 20 percent, he said.

Lynch said the hope is that the drug will improve the memory of patients with Alzheimer's disease, a progressive disorder that destroys memory and other functions of the brain and eventually kills. About 5 million Americans, mostly elderly, have Alzheimer's, and it is estimated that the number will climb to 15 million over the next quarter-century as the nation's population ages.

Ampakine CX-516 has been

tested only on small groups in clinical experiments to detect any toxic effects. A more definitive test will start next year at the National Institutes of Health, when 16 patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease will be given the drug.

Dr. Donald Price, a neuroscience researcher at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, said the new drug is "intriguing and innovative" and that it will influence "a very important synapse" in the brain.

However, he said, "I have reservations about its use in Alzheimer's, because it does not directly address the disease mechanism. It is a palliative."

"I would suspend my enthusiasm until I see the results of the clinical trials. It is quite early" in the drug development process, Price said.

Lynch and co-workers at the University of California, Irvine, discovered the drug in 1991 while searching for compounds to improve communications between neurons in the brain.

## Russia runs low on ruble

Money problems plagued space program before Mars '96 failure

MOSCOW (AP) — With the biggest launch since the Soviet breakup, Russia's space scientists had hoped to revitalize the ailing space program with Mars '96, an ambitious mission to the Red Planet.

But the unmanned craft never made it out of Earth's orbit Sunday, and disappointed scientists are now looking at a bleak future of shrinking budgets, aging facilities and dim prospects for any new missions.

The space probe, which would have reached Mars in September, was already two years behind schedule by the time it lifted off late Saturday night at the Baikonur cosmodrome in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan.

Scientists blamed the delay on chronic money problems in a program that is receiving only one-fifth the cash it got in Soviet times.

The Russians spent \$64 million over the past two years preparing for Mars '96 — a large sum for the impoverished Russians, spare change for the American space program.

One example: the United States is paying Russia \$335 million just to sublet the Mir space station, where U.S. astronaut John Blaha currently has a four-month, time-share deal with two Russian cosmonauts.

Mir, which is nearing the end of its life after 10 years, is a shining example of Soviet-era successes. But the Russian space program has been "running on the brink of collapse for several years," said James Oberg, an American specialist on Rus-

sian space activities. Oberg described Mars '96 as "a strikingly ambitious mission even for a healthy space program." But, he added, "you can't keep the odds indefinitely."

Even before Mars '96 left the ground, space officials warned it could be Russia's Mars mission in the foreseeable future.

"There aren't any booster rockets. They're using pregame money," one of the scientists on the Vladimir Utkin, told reporters last week.

Against long odds, Russian space officials hoped that this year would showcase their move ahead with cutting-edge projects. Instead, it has highlighted the painful limitations of their resource-strapped program.

At the Star City space compound near Moscow, officials in February hailed the "remarkable achievement" of keeping Mir in orbit for a decade. It was launched Feb. 20, 1986.

In April, the Russians celebrated the 35th anniversary of the flight that made Yuri Gagarin the first person in space.

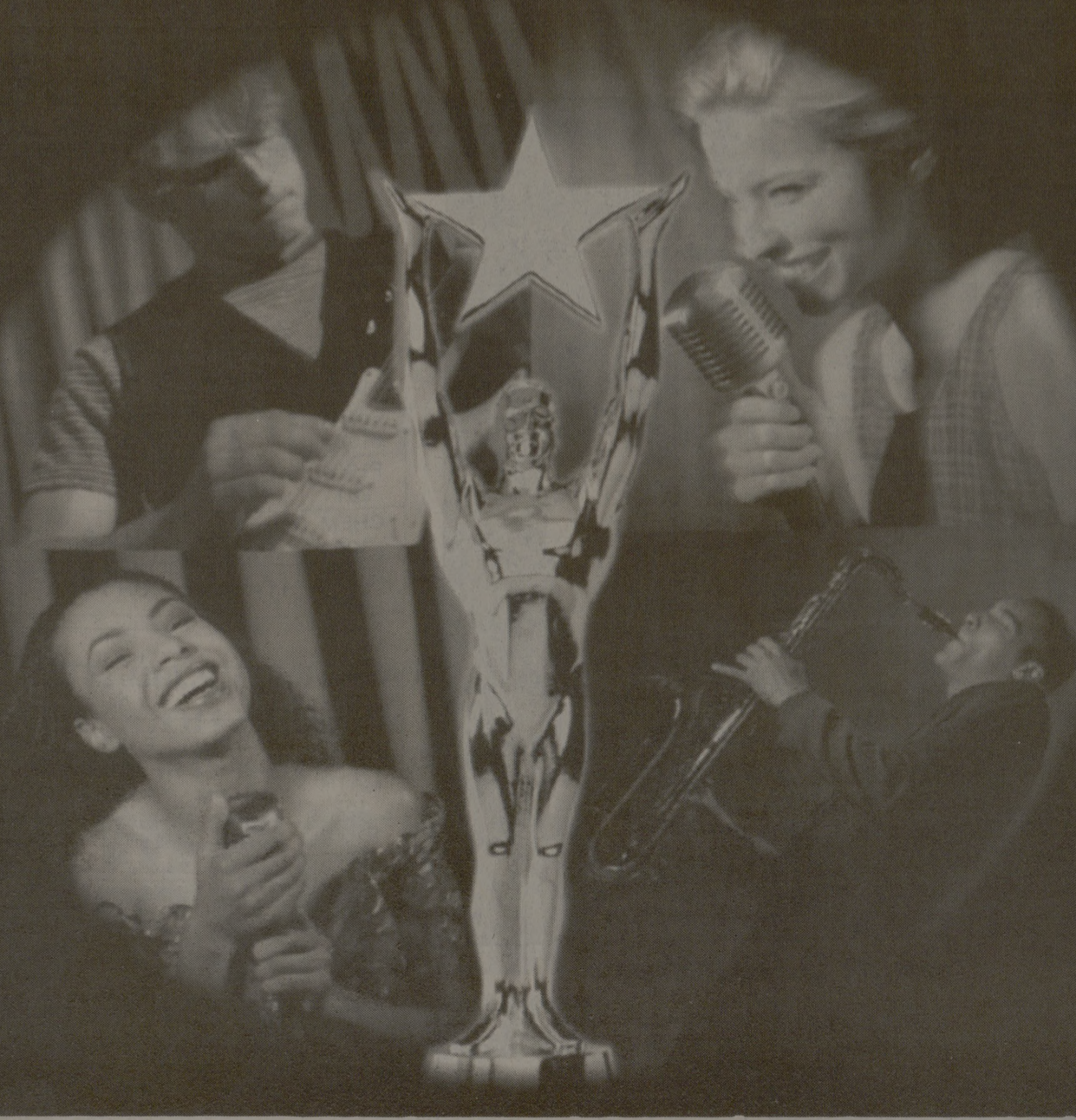
Mars '96 was to provide the proof that Russia would still have a first-rate space program in the 21st century.

The craft had several innovative features designed to investigate the evolution of a Martian atmosphere, its surface and the interior of a planet where some scientists say there is life.

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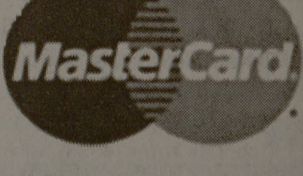
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## Big 12

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