

LAW & JUSTICE

Oregon Woman Proves Marijuana was Legal

Has received government pot for decades

(AP) — Sometime after midnight on a moonlit rural Oregon highway, a state trooper checking a car he had just pulled over found less than an ounce of pot on one passenger: A chatty 72-year-old woman blind in one eye.

She insisted the weed was legal and was approved by the U.S. government.

The trooper and his supervisor were doubtful. But after a series of calls to the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Drug Enforcement Agency and her physician, the troopers handed her back the card — and her pot.

For the past three decades, Uncle Sam has been providing a handful of patients with some of the highest grade marijuana around. The program grew out of a 1976 court settlement that created the country's first legal pot smoker.

Advocates for legalizing marijuana or treating it as a medicine say the program is a glaring contradiction in the nation's 40-year war on drugs — maintaining the federal ban on pot while at the same time supplying it.

Government officials say there is no contradiction. The program is no longer accepting new patients, and public health authorities have concluded that there was no scientific value to it, Steven Gust of the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse told The Associated Press.

At one point, 14 people were getting government pot. Now, there are four left.

The government has only continued to supply the marijuana "for compassionate reasons," Gust said.

One of the recipients is Elvy Musikka, the chatty Oregon woman. A vocal marijuana advocate, Musikka relies on the pot to keep her glaucoma under control. She entered the program in 1988, and said that her experience with marijuana is proof that it works as a medicine.

They "won't acknowledge the fact that I do not have even one aspirin in this house," she said, leaning back on her couch, glass bong cradled in her hand. "I have no pain."

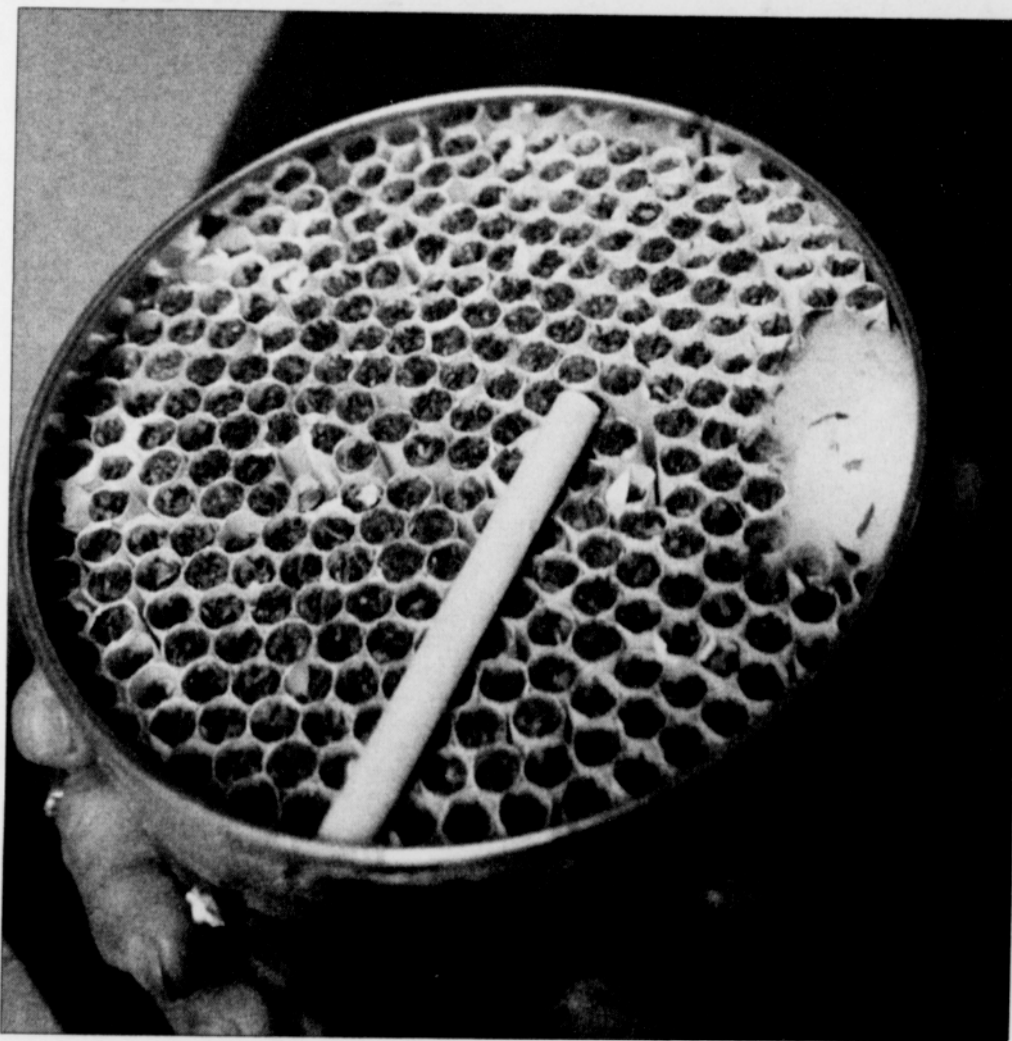
In 1976, a federal judge ruled



All of the marijuana comes from the University of Mississippi, where it is grown, harvested and stored.

The marijuana is then sent to a tightly controlled North Carolina lab, where they are rolled into cigarettes. And every month, steel tins are packed with a half-pound of marijuana rolled into 300 perfectly-wrapped joints for delivery to the patients.

Elvy Musikka, 72, who suffers from glaucoma, lights a marijuana cigarette, one of many she regularly receives from the U.S. government, at her home in Eugene. (AP photo)



An Oregon woman who suffers from glaucoma holds the canister of marijuana cigarettes that she regularly receives from the federal government. (AP photo)

that the Food and Drug Administration must provide Robert Randall of Washington, D.C. with marijuana because of his glaucoma — no other drug could effectively combat his condition. Randall became the nation's first legal pot smoker since the drug's prohibition.

Eventually, the government created its program as part of a compromise over Randall's care in 1978, long before a single state

passed a medical marijuana law. What followed were a series of petitions from people like Musikka to join the program.

President George H.W. Bush's administration, getting tough on crime and drugs, stopped accepting new patients in 1992.

The four patients remaining in the program estimate they have received a total of 584 pounds from the federal government over the years.

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