

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Cocaine: Studies show drug major health threat

WASHINGTON — A series of drug abuse studies released by the government Wednesday indicated more than one of every four young adults has at least tried cocaine, which has emerged as a major public health threat, said a top federal health official.

Dr. Donald Ian McDonald, head of the federal Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration, said cocaine "is one of the most powerfully addictive drugs known."

"For years, people thought cocaine was harmless — a so-called 'recreational drug,'" Mac Donald said. "Now, we know the truth: Cocaine can be a killer. Emergency-room admissions associated with cocaine use tripled between 1981 and 1984. The number of deaths associated with cocaine also tripled."

In one of the papers published by the agency, Michigan researchers reported that use of cocaine, unlike other illicit drugs, tends to increase among young people after they graduate from school, and that young people also see

less risk in cocaine experimentation by themselves or others as they grow older.

The researchers also said that while physical dependence on the drug is not inevitable, even among heavy users, the risk of becoming dependent is higher for cocaine than for other drugs.

"Overall, we find a disturbingly high proportion of young adults in America place themselves at risk of developing a dependency on this highly reinforcing drug by taking the initial step of trying it," said Drs. Patrick O'Malley and Lloyd D. Johnston of the University of Michigan.

The two researchers, reporting on the progress of surveys under way for the last 10 years, said that about 16 percent, or one in every six, of high school seniors in the class of 1984 reported experimentation with cocaine. Twelve percent reported use within the previous year, while 6 percent reported use within the previous month.

Daily use — defined as use on 20 or more occasions within the last month

— was a minuscule 0.3 percent, indicating that cocaine use "is not all that common a behavior among high school seniors," the researchers said.

But experimentation with cocaine tends to increase in later years, the researchers said. Citing follow-up polls of people who were first surveyed when they were in high school, the study found "a dramatic increase in cocaine use after high school," with new users for the drug appearing well into their 20s.

Among young adults aged 18 to 25, 28 percent have tried cocaine, MacDonald said. And an estimated 60,000 12- and 13-year-olds have tried the drug, he said.

People became more tolerant of cocaine experimentation as they grew older, the researchers said.

Yet, the researchers said, the risk of cocaine appears very real. While there is no inevitable progression to a habit, a full 18 percent of those trying cocaine go on to use it on 40 or more occasions.

Hostage Weir freed; 6 remain

CONCORD, N.H. — The Rev. Benjamin Weir is free after a 16-month kidnapping ordeal in Lebanon, but President Reagan said Wednesday that he "will not be satisfied" until the six remaining American captives also are released.

Weir was released to U.S. authorities in Beirut on Saturday, but an announcement was withheld to determine whether the release of the other Americans might follow.

"We were trying to keep it so quiet because we don't want to do anything that endangers the chances of the other six," Reagan said at the conclusion of a speech promoting his tax reform proposal.

But White House spokesman Edward Djerejian, briefing the press after Rea-

gan's speech, said it became apparent Tuesday night that no more releases were "imminent."

Weir, 61, a Presbyterian minister, was kidnapped by terrorists May 8, 1984, in Beirut. Neither Reagan nor Djerejian offered any details about his release. He said the United States had "absolutely" made no deal with the terrorists who had held Weir. "Our position on negotiating with terrorists is very clear," he said.

When Weir was kidnapped, a man claiming to represent Islamic Holy War or Islamic Jihad, a terrorist group, told the French news agency Agence France Press that his organization was behind the incident. The group had claimed responsibility for the Oct. 23, 1983 truck bombing of Marine headquarters at Beirut airport, which killed 241, as

well as attacks on a French paratroop building in Beirut and an Israeli post in southern Lebanon.

In addition to Weir, Islamic Jihad also has claimed responsibility for abducting the other six Americans. The Americans who remain captive and the dates they were kidnapped are: William Buckley, 56, U.S. Embassy political officer, March 16, 1984; Peter Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut, Dec. 3, 1984; the Rev. Lawrence Jenco, 50, a Roman Catholic priest, Jan. 8, 1985; Terry Anderson, 37, chief Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press, March 16, 1985; David Jacobsen, 54, director of the American University Hospital, May 28, 1985, and Thomas Sutherland, 53, dean of agriculture at the American University, June 9, 1985.

Education reformers chalk one up

By Lee Mitgang
AP Education Writer

California's decision to reject nearly 30 biology textbooks for watering down the theory of evolution has opened a crucial new front in the three-year battle to weed out mediocrity in America's schools.

California's school board, led by schools superintendent Bill Honig, voted last week to reject the junior high school texts printed by about a dozen publishers. On Monday, several publishers agreed to revise their texts to put more emphasis on the theory of evolution, which holds that mankind evolved from lower forms of life. This wasn't just a replay of the old debate over Darwin and apes.

For the first time, the spotlight of school reform shifted to where some educators have argued it has belonged all along: On educational

materials like textbooks and computer software which many have criticized as so dull and intellectually bankrupt that they represent a roadblock to school excellence.

California's use of its textbook — buying power to force publishers to make changes in biology texts showed that in at least some respects, educational excellence and the laws of the marketplace are inseparable.

Honig, a maverick not easily categorized as a liberal or conservative, has taken on two formidable foes. On one hand are religious fundamentalists like Kelly Segraves who operates the Science Creation Research Center in San Diego and who have had considerable success in getting biology texts to give less space to the theory of evolution. On the other hand are textbook publishers who have seen school reform movements come and

go, and who have openly doubted that educational excellence sells in the long run. But it's the struggle with the publishers, not the fundamentalists, that could have lasting significance in determining the future direction of school reform.

Until California's action last week, it seemed that the school reform movement might eventually founder in a losing battle with the balance sheets of publishers. But Honig's action, and the publishing industry's quick response, demonstrated that some states may have more power than they think to get publishers to change their texts quickly, and for the better.

California has told the publishing industry it wants more challenging and intellectually sound texts — and it's putting its \$100 million in textbook purchasing power where its mouth is.

Newsmakers

A roundup of the day's happenings

Patrick Ewing, a 7-foot center from Georgetown University signed a contract Wednesday with the New York Knicks that makes him the highest-paid rookie ever in pro basketball and one of the richest ever in professional sports. He reportedly will earn more than \$16 million. The length of the contract has not been disclosed.

Chrysler Corp. chairman Lee Iacocca has delivered another emphatic "no!" to the notion that he will run for president of the United States. "I don't want to sound selfish," he said. "I'd pitch in. I would help out. But I'm not a political animal and I don't want to be in the political world."

A Lancaster County man has filed a lawsuit against two casket companies after the bottom fell out of a casket during a funeral in January. Joseph Pearl filed the suit, alleging that as he and other pallbearers were removing the casket from the hearse at the cemetery, the casket's bottom fell to the ground, striking his foot and exposing the deceased's body to him. Pearl said the incident caused him "extreme embarrassment, humiliation and ignominy" and forced him to see a psychiatrist.

Most Lancaster County employees now are getting a 3-percent raise in wages, retroactive to Aug. 29. The Lancaster County Board approved a one-year contract calling for the salary increase for about 650 full-time workers.

The State Department of Banking and Finance closed the Elba State Bank and acting state Banking Director Roger Hirsch says he doubts a buyer can be found. That means the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. would pay for insured deposits and would take over outstanding loans, 85 percent of which are agriculture-related. The bank failure is the ninth this year in Nebraska and the 82nd in the nation.

Philadelphia Mayor W. Wilson Goode says he is optimistic that new homes will be ready by next May for all 250 people left homeless by the fatal MOVE fire four months ago. At a "topping-off" ceremony Tuesday marking the installation of the first roof on one of the 61 homes being rebuilt, Goode said construction is on schedule and that he is satisfied with the quality of the work.

In Brief

Britain calls halt to 'spy' expulsions

LONDON — Britain called a halt Wednesday to the exchange of diplomatic expulsions that began when the KGB's top agent in London defected. The end came after the Soviet Union ordered six more Britons out, making the score 31-31.

The Kremlin, in its first major diplomatic imbroglio since Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power March 11, took the unusual decision to retaliate in equal number to Britain's expulsion of 25 alleged Soviet spies last Thursday and six more on Monday.

The Foreign Office said after Moscow completed the second round Wednesday that it would not evict any more Soviets, insisting that it had not backed down and that Britain had come out ahead.

The cycle of ejections reduced the number of British citizens in Moscow from 103 to 72 and the number of Soviets in London from 234 to 203.

Special session to convene tonight

LINCOLN — A special legislative session will convene at 9 p.m. today to repair a defective law that was supposed to appropriate \$8.5 million for claim filed on behalf of Commonwealth Savings Co. depositors.

Gov. Bob Kerrey emphasized Wednesday that he wanted the session limited only to the issue of amending the law involving the Commonwealth appropriation.

To expedite work to correct technical flaws in LB713, a tentative week-long schedule was drawn up by legislative leaders. It calls for senators to work shortly past midnight two nights.

Sileven proposes farm program

OMAHA — The Rev. Everett Sileven, who is seeking the Republican nomination for governor, proposed a farm program that he said would save the state's agricultural economy while keeping farmers on their land.

In a speech to Douglas County Republicans Sileven suggested that the state buy the balance due on farmers' loans from banks by issuing scrip currency to banks holding the loans. The scrip could be backed by either silver or state tax revenue, he said. Farmers would then have seven years to repay their loans, interest-free to the state, Sileven said. He said he chose the seven-year period because of its biblical significance in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.

"We don't need a solution whereby farmers are removed from their farms," Sileven said. "We need a solution whereby farmers stay on their farms and their youth are encouraged to go into farming."

Changes in reading ability recorded

WASHINGTON — The reading ability of 17-year-old students improved in the past four years after a decade of stagnation, but 9- and 13-year-olds have stopped making progress, a federally backed testing agency said Wednesday.

At all three ages levels, pupils read better now than in 1971, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported, and the biggest gains have been registered by blacks and Hispanics.

But "The Reading Report Card," a study based on tests administered to 250,000 school children during the past 14 years, also dramatized the big gap remaining between minorities and the white majority.

The average black and Hispanic 17-year-olds can read "only slightly" better than the average white 13-year-old, it said.

Secretary of Education William J. Bennett called the findings "good news and bad news."

He expressed concern that almost 36 percent of the 9-year-olds have not acquired the basic comprehension skills needed to succeed in third- and fourth-grade work, and the 40 percent of 13-year-olds and 16 percent of 17-year-old students lacked the intermediate skills "to handle much of what is studied in a sixth- or seventh-grade class."

New law could restrict AIDS coverage

MILWAUKEE — A state legislator has drafted a proposal to allow insurance companies access to AIDS virus tests following complaints that a new Wisconsin law limiting such access might mean excluding AIDS victims from insurance coverage.

"If we were forced into it by the state telling us we could not even find out what a person's condition is, we would have to consider (exclusion) of some policies," said George Hardy, legislative counsel for Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Co.

He has drafted language for an amendment to allow insurance companies to see the AIDS test results, and Rep. Gervase Hephner of Chilton has drafted a proposal that would allow insurance companies to look at test results.

Soviets technology collection experts

WASHINGTON — The Soviet Union is conducting a campaign to acquire Western technology that has been so successful that the West is "subsidizing the Soviet military build-up," the Pentagon said Wednesday.

The Pentagon report released by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, said "only recently has the full extent of illegal Soviet technology collection efforts become known." While there are signs that efforts by the United States and its allies to stem the diversion of technical information have made life more difficult for the Soviets, much more must be done because "the Soviets' appetite for Western technology will continue to be voracious," the report said.

According to the report, the Soviets have divided their technology-diversion efforts between two programs. The first is managed by the Soviet Military Industrial Commission, drawing on agents of the KGB, the military intelligence directorate known as the GRU and "surrogate" agents from the Warsaw Pact.

The second program is managed by the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade and focuses on the acquisition of so-called "dual-use equipment" — equipment designed for one purpose but capable of being used in the production of weapons as well.