

Ellen Rosenblum and the new DOJ



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS

Big expectations await Oregon's new attorney general

BY JAKE THOMAS
STAFF WRITER

Ellen Rosenblum had some high-profile shoes to fill when she was sworn in as Oregon's first female attorney general earlier this summer. She completes the term of John Kroger, the Enron-trial hero, author and publicity heavy who resigned the post to become president of Reed College.

But Rosenblum brings her own set of legal chops to the state's top law office. Rosenblum's long legal career in Oregon includes representing author Ken Kesey in a dispute over the film adaptation of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," as well as a 14-year stint as a federal prosecutor and 22 years as an appellate and trial judge.

While running judge Dwight Holton in the Democratic primary for the office, Rosenblum became an unexpected hero for advocates of liberalized marijuana laws after she took positions that put her in sharp contrast to her opponent, a former U.S. attorney who had been at the forefront of the federal crackdown on medical cannabis.

Although Rosenblum said she would make enforcement actions against pot a low priority as attorney general and would stand up for the state's medical marijuana law in the face of federal opposition, she never fully embraced her branding as a champion of cannabis. She claimed she merely wanted to make sensible use of limited law enforcement resources and respect the will of the

voters on medical marijuana. Regardless, the enthusiasm and money she drew from medical marijuana advocates helped catapult her to victory.

Rosenblum comes to the job after 49 state attorneys general reached a settlement with five of the country's largest lending institutions. The agreement addressed mortgage loan servicing and fraud by the banks that caused a wave of foreclosures across the country. The lawsuit produced a \$25 billion settlement, as well as new protections for homeowners that Rosenblum will have a hand in implementing.

Street Roots spoke to Rosenblum about how she plans to uphold civil liberties in an age of increasing government surveillance, what marijuana legalization might mean for her office, difficulties in keeping distressed homeowners in their homes, the high cost of incarceration and how she hopes to improve some of the little-noticed services her office provides. We began our conversation with one of the more controversial issues in Portland's law enforcement practices.

Jake Thomas: *Do you agree with your predecessor that Portland should have rejoined the Joint Terrorism Task Force (a partnership between various U.S. law enforcement agencies that has been criticized for violating the First Amendment rights of activists)?*

Ellen Rosenblum: Not necessarily. I was perfectly comfortable with us having not joined it,

and I never understood what the considerations were in rejoining it.

I have a lot of concerns about civil liberties. I met yesterday with representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union to hear their issues. That was not one of their issues that they raised with me. So I haven't put that on my table with my issues. When I heard we were rejoining, I had some of the same concerns that the city had when they decided not to.

J.T.: *What were your concerns?*

E.R.: I just want to make sure that our local governments, and not so much our federal government, are in charge of our public safety. That when we collaborate with the federal government, we do it appropriately. I have a close relationship with Amanda Marshall, our U.S. attorney. I want to work well with her, but when it comes to our city and state government, our local leaders should make those decisions, and not the be pressured by the federal government. Even though it seemed like we were in control, I had concerns that federal oversight would make that difficult.

J.T.: *Oregon has strong laws in place that prohibit law enforcement from spying on the political and*

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