

Sessions ends federal policy that let pot flourish

Oregon lawmakers push back

By **SADIE GURMAN**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Jeff Sessions has rescinded an Obama-era policy that paved the way for legalized marijuana to flourish in states across the country, creating new confusion about enforcement and use just three days after a new legalization law went into effect in California.

President Donald Trump's top law enforcement official announced the change today. Instead of the previous lenient-federal-enforcement policy, Sessions' new stance will instead let federal prosecutors where marijuana is legal decide how aggressively to enforce longstanding federal law prohibiting it.

Sessions' plan drew immediate strong objection from Republican U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner of Colorado, one of eight states that have legalized marijuana for recreational use.

Gardner said in a tweet that the Justice Department "has trampled on the will of the voters" in Colorado and other states. He said the action would contradict what Sessions had told him before the attorney general was confirmed and that he was prepared "to take all steps necessary" to fight the step including holding up the confirmation of Justice Department nominees.

Political leaders in Oregon and Washington state also condemned the shift.

Gov. Kate Brown said rolling back federal marijuana policy will disrupt the state's economy. She said over 19,000 jobs have been created by the marijuana market in Oregon, which was the first state to decriminalize personal possession in 1973, legalized medical marijuana in 1998, and recreational use in 2014.

Washington state Gov. Jay Inslee said the state will vigorously defend the state's laws against federal infringement.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said the move ignores the will of a majority of Americans. "Trump promised to let states set their own marijuana policies," the



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The Trump administration has changed the federal government's approach to marijuana.

senator said in a statement. "Now he's breaking that promise so Jeff Sessions can pursue his extremist anti-marijuana crusade. Once again the Trump administration is doubling down on protecting states' rights only when they believe the state is right."

Sessions rescinded the policy by president Barack Obama's Justice Department that has generally barred federal law enforcement officials from interfering with marijuana sales in states where the drug is legal.

"In deciding which marijuana activities to prosecute under these laws with the department's finite resources,

prosecutors should follow the well-established principles that govern all federal prosecutions," by considering the seriousness of the crime and its impact on the community, Sessions wrote in a one-page memo to the nation's federal prosecutors.

The move by Trump's attorney general likely is sure to add to confusion about whether it's OK to grow, buy or use marijuana in states where the drug is legal.

It comes just after shops opened in California, launching what is expected to become the world's largest market for legal recreational marijuana and as

polls show a solid majority of Americans believe the drug should be legal.

While Sessions has been carrying out a Justice Department agenda that follows Trump's top priorities on such issues as immigration and opioids, the changes to marijuana policy reflect his own concerns. Trump's personal views on marijuana remain largely unknown.

Sessions, who has assailed marijuana as comparable to heroin and has blamed it for spikes in violence, had been expected to ramp up enforcement. Marijuana advocates argue that legalizing the drug eliminates the need for a black market and will likely reduce violence, since criminals would no longer control the marijuana trade.

The Obama administration in 2013 announced it would stand in the way of states that legalize marijuana, so long as officials acted to keep it from migrating to places where it remained outlawed and keep it out of the hands of criminal gangs and children. Sessions is rescinding that memo, written by then-Deputy Attorney General James M. Cole, which had

cleared up some of the uncertainty about how the federal government would respond as states began allowing sales for recreational and medical purposes.

The marijuana business has since become a sophisticated, multimillion-dollar industry that helps fund some government programs. Eight states and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana for recreational use, and California's sales alone are projected to bring in \$1 billion annually in tax revenue within several years.

But the Sessions Justice Department believed the Cole memo created a "safe harbor" for marijuana sales that are federally illegal, Justice Department officials said. Sessions in the memo called the Obama guidance "unnecessary."

Sessions' policy will let U.S. attorneys across the country decide what kinds of federal resources to devote to marijuana enforcement based on what they see as priorities in their districts. Officials couldn't say what the ultimate impact will be on the legal industry or whether it will lead to more pot prosecutions.

Seaside apologizes for tsunami false alarm

Some feared a potential disaster

By **BRENNA VISSER**
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — Residents and tourists were left confused and startled Wednesday morning after hearing a tsunami warning alert instead of the regular monthly test siren.

A malfunction in the system replaced what was supposed to be a test message with an alert that advised a tsunami was approaching in four hours.

"For years, the city has been running monthly tests of the system on the first Wednesday of the month," said Jon Rahl, the city's public information officer. "While evaluating the system in December, the server that runs these warnings crashed. Early morning testing today led us to believe the system was back online and would operate correctly."



The usual procedure was followed when conducting the test, Rahl said, but reports indicate that one of the pre-recorded messages the city has to warn of an actual emergency pre-empted the usual "this is only a test" message.

"We regret the error," Rahl said, "but it's also a reminder of why we do these tests and run them throughout the year. Tests give us the opportunity to evaluate what's working, and in this case what's not."

About 15 minutes after the alarm, the Seaside Police Department sent email and text notifications explaining and correcting the error.

But Rich Trucke, owner of Trucke's 1-Stop, said panic had already set in for some of his customers.

"It's 11 a.m. on a Wednesday, I assured the panic-stricken tourists. 'They test regularly,'" he wrote in a letter to The Daily Astorian.

A moment later, he wrote,

someone hastily drove up, demanding gas to leave town. They told Trucke the system warned that a wave was coming in four hours. Another person told Trucke it was a mistake, but when he called the Seaside police non-emergency line, he was faced with a busy signal and no answers for all of the customers calling asking him questions.

"We never heard another report from the public warning system saying, 'This is just a test,' or any follow-up at all. Now I am answering phones and calming visitors. One customer had me dial his 95-year-old mother to let her know not to worry anymore, since he had called her earlier to have her pack her things for evacuation," Trucke wrote. "Reaching only her answering machine, he left quickly. Were this an actual tsunami, how many would fail to get the true message?"

City management and the Seaside Police Department are working together to continually improve the system, Rahl said.

Hammond fisherman pleads not guilty to sex abuse crimes

Sturgell charged with 13 offenses

By **JACK HEFFERNAN**
The Daily Astorian

Dennis Lee Sturgell Sr., a well-known Hammond fisherman, pleaded not guilty Wednesday to multiple charges involving alleged sex crimes against a young woman in 2015.

Sturgell, 65, was indicted in November on seven sex abuse charges, four counts of first-degree sodomy and two counts of first-degree unlawful sexual penetration. He was arrested and released on \$500,000 bail.

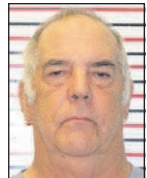
Sturgell allegedly coordinated with James Lee Cunningham, 46, of Astoria, to commit several sex crimes

against the woman while she was incapacitated one day in August 2015.

Cunningham, who is serving time in prison for a separate case and has not been scheduled for arraignment, has been charged with several sex crimes, including one count of first-degree rape.

Sturgell faces a minimum of 62 1/2 years in prison if convicted.

Oregon Assistant Attorney General Erin Greenawald, who has expertise in domestic and sexual violence crimes, is prosecuting the case, along with the Clatsop County District Attorney's Office. Sturgell has been scheduled for an early resolution conference in May.



Dennis Lee Sturgell Sr.

Investigators: Hayes violated ethics laws

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

Former Oregon first lady Cylvia Hayes violated several state ethics laws when she used her public position and state staff and resources to win a paid fellowship and contracts for her environmental consulting firm between 2011 and 2013, state investigators have concluded.

Investigators with the Oregon Ethics Commission and the state Department of Justice outlined their findings in an ethics investigation report released early Wednesday.

The Oregon Ethics Commission will consider the report Friday to determine whether it agrees with investigators' findings and to determine fines of up to \$5,000 per violation.

Hayes and former Gov. John Kitzhaber have been under an ethics investigation since July.

They had been under a federal criminal investigation for more than two years before that, after Willamette Week reported the first lady may have used her position to win several consulting contracts. The scandal eventually prompted Kitzhaber to resign from office in February 2015 and led to former Secretary of State Kate Brown's succession as governor.

Federal prosecutors ultimately filed no charges against the couple. By the time the federal investigation had concluded, the statute of

limitation had run out for any state charges.

In November, the ethics commission rejected a proposed settlement with Kitzhaber in which he agreed to pay \$1,000 for ethics violations related to conflicts of interest and accepting gifts with value of more than \$50. A majority of commissioners said they felt the settlement was too lenient.

The ethics commission will reconsider his case next month.

Lisa Hay, Hayes's public defender, said that her client was in an unprecedented position when she took public office because she was an unmarried partner of the governor, was not supported by him, kept her own residence and had to work to support herself.

"Cylvia attempted in good faith to define her role as both the first lady and as a consultant in order to understand the boundaries of each," Hay wrote in a response to state ethics investigators' findings. "She frequently sought advice. Any errors in adhering to state ethics rules or statutes were the result of confusion within the administration, mistakes and the lack of clear guidelines for an unmarried partner and not due to criminal intent to commit fraud."



Google Maps

Area of speed reduction.

Gearhart lowers speed limit near golf course

By **R.J. MARX**
The Daily Astorian

GEARHART — Golfers in a hurry to get to the course?

It's understandable in a city where golf is a tradition, the mayor is a PGA professional and the Gearhart Golf Links is the oldest in the Northwest.

On Wednesday night, city councilors lowered the speed limit from 35 mph to 25 mph on Gearhart Lane between U.S. Highway 101 and Marion.

"Nothing against golfers, but there are some people who come out of Marion like a bat out of hell to Pacific Way," City Councilor Kerry Smith said in support of the lower limit. "It's a residential community. Twenty-five mph, period, from the get-go when you enter Gearhart."

The request came after Daniel Lane, chairman of the Clubhouse Condominium Association, submitted a petition in September signed by 33 nearby property owners as a result of cars "whipping around the blind curve right at our entrance."

"Seems like as soon as drivers hit that 35 mph zone they accelerate through that curve," Lane wrote. "I have had a few close calls myself."

Golfers crossing Gearhart Lane from the first green to the second tee of Gearhart Golf Links have also reported near misses, City Administrator Chad Sweet said.

Police Chief Jeff Bowman had no issue with the change, Sweet said, and speed reduction was consistent with city transportation plan goals to increase safety for cars, pedestrians and bicyclists. Signs, flagging and postings

would "probably be under \$1,000" and could be paid for from the current budget.

After discussion, Mayor Matt Brown and councilors unanimously supported the reduction.

"When you come into Gearhart, you kind of go, 'ahhh,'" Councilor Paulina Cockrum said. "It's a relaxing feeling. That kind of goes along with the 25 mph. It's not a place you need to speed."

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