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Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum said Wednesday that House Bill 2355 has 'made significant inroads' in reducing racial disparities and reducing the number of all Oregonians convicted of felonies for minor amounts of drugs.

Report: Disparity in drug convictions has declined

Early results from new law

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A disparity in the rate of drug possession convictions between blacks and whites has declined dramatically as a result of an anti-racial profiling law that took effect over a year ago, according to a report by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission.

The new law reduced from felonies to misdemeanors crimes for possessing personal use amounts of six drugs.

A state task force earlier found that Oregon blacks were disproportionately being convicted of drug felonies for having small amounts.

"I am proud to report what appear to be positive signs that this legislation is working as intended," Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum said in testimony Wednesday. She said the law — House Bill 2355 — "made significant inroads" in reducing racial disparities and reducing the number of all Oregonians convicted of felonies for minor amounts of drugs.

"This reflects the belief of the majority of our task force that addiction cannot be addressed through punishment alone and that a conviction with the potential to take away a person's employment and housing leaves them poorly situated to overcome that addiction," she said.

The six possession charges reduced to misdemeanors were:

- Less than 40 user units of psychedelic mushrooms
- Less than 40 pills or units of prescription drug opioids, oxycodone or methadone
- Less than 1 gram of heroin
- Less than 1 gram or five pills of ecstasy
- Less than 2 grams of cocaine
- Less than 2 grams of methamphetamine

The report found that the number of drug-related felony convictions decreased by 2,000 in one year, a reduction of about 40 percent. That doesn't mean they escaped prosecution entirely. Drug-related misdemeanors in the same time increased from 224 to 1,443.

The disparity in drug possession convictions between blacks and whites declined by 80 percent, according to

the report. In 2016-17, whites accounted for 83 percent of drug possession convictions, even though they make up 85 percent of the population, while blacks accounted for 3.6 percent of those convictions while they are 1.9 percent of the population. The following year, that fell to 2.9 percent, while the percentage of conviction of whites remained the same.

The reduction in convictions has had almost no impact on the prison population because probation was often the punishment for even a felony conviction. The reduced charge means first-time offenders avoid barriers to employment and housing that come with a felony.

The legislation disqualified individuals with a pre-existing felony of any type and those with two or more misdemeanor convictions from benefiting from the reclassification. Those with at least one prior felony or two prior misdemeanors still face felony prosecution for even minor amounts of drugs.

Members of the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police and Oregon State Sheriffs Association supported that approach because, they said, they wanted to target first-time offenders who were serious about addressing their addiction issues.

But criminal justice reform advocates, including Bobbin Singh of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, argued in the past that the disqualification discriminates against people of color, because they already have a greater rate of conviction.

The new law also required the state's 12 largest police agencies to record race data during traffic and pedestrian stops. The Criminal Justice Commission plans to review that data for trends in racial profiling. In the next two years, the rest of the state's law enforcement agencies will also be required to record that data.

That work "will allow us a never-before-seen look into the everyday interactions between Oregonians and their law enforcement," Rosenblum said, and will "provide us an even deeper dive into the mechanics, trends and, if present, biases embedded within those interactions."

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group, Pamplin Media Group and Salem Reporter.

Disasters declared for salmon fisheries along West Coast

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Federal officials have determined that commercial fishery failures occurred for salmon in Washington state, Oregon and California, making those fisheries eligible for federal disaster assistance.

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross on Tuesday also announced a commercial fishery failure for the sardine fishery in California, but not for the state's red sea urchin fishery.

The governors from Washington state, Oregon and Cal-

ifornia and multiple Native American tribes had requested the determinations between July 2016 and last March. Their requests noted unusually warm and poor ocean conditions that affected fish.

The disaster determinations make salmon and sardine fisheries eligible for some portion of \$20 million in National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration fishery disaster assistance. The Commerce Department is figuring out how to allocate that money to eligible fisheries.

Local governments OK enterprise zone expansion

County backed expansion Wednesday

By **JACK HEFFERNAN**
The Daily Astorian

Clatsop County has approved expanding the Clatsop Enterprise Zone to include most of the Astoria waterfront, representing the final nod needed for the idea.

Commissioners voted unanimously Wednesday to approve the expansion, following Astoria, the Port of Astoria and Warrenton. The expansion will also include portions of downtown Astoria, the Port's main waterfront, the East Mooring Basin and parts of the Youngs Bay waterfront.

Astoria rejected the enterprise zone in 2015 over qualms about partnering with the Port. City councilors reconsidered this year, while excluding hotels, motels and destination resorts from the tax incentive.

The shift came after a March presentation from Hyak Maritime CEO Robert Dorn. The enterprise zone will now feature industrial docks at North

Tongue Point owned by the tug and barge building company, which plans to develop a maritime repair and fabrication center.

The enterprise zone offers three- to five-year tax breaks on improvements from eligible development projects. Enterprise zones are intended to attract businesses to areas experiencing economic hardship.

expressed concerns about the expansion, citing possible traffic issues, a housing crunch and a lack of available workers.

"The businesses currently operating in Astoria have not been given the same kind of support to expand and succeed, why are new businesses more deserving?" the letter asked.

In other business Wednesday, commissioners:

- Took possession of a fore-

After a first-of-its kind hearing for the county earlier this month, commissioners directed staff to begin the process of taking it over.

The owner, Scott Wood, has 30 days to vacate the land.

- Accepted the deed to the property that holds the now-shuttered North Coast Youth Correctional Facility.

The state has owned the land, with an estimated value of \$12.1 million, since 1996 and was required to hand the property back to the county after the closure. A \$20 million bond in the November election would, if passed, remodel the facility into a new county jail.

- Appointed Brittany Bodway Israel, who owns the Dairy Queen on West Marine Drive, to the county Fair Board.

She will serve the remainder of the term vacated by Paul Mitchell, who resigned earlier this year. The term runs through 2019.

- Agreed to purchase a roughly \$400,000 Gradall excavator for the county Public Works Department.

An excavator is a specialized machine used to dig ditches and perform other functions like debris removal, bridge work and culvert installation. The department has a 15-year-old machine that is experiencing many mechanical failures, wrote Ted McLean, assistant public works director, in an agenda item summary.

'The businesses currently operating in Astoria have not been given the same kind of support to expand and succeed, why are new businesses more deserving?'

excerpt from a letter from the Sunset Empire Transportation District board, expressing concerns about the expansion

The primary beneficiaries will be manufacturers and other types of industries that are rare to the area, said Kevin Leahy, executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources.

"We just want to show in this discussion that this is a business-friendly community," Leahy said.

In a letter handed to commissioners, the Sunset Empire Transportation District board

closed Jeffers Garden property on G Road about a year ahead of schedule. The property was foreclosed in October, and the owners had two years to keep the property under state law.

But officials cited various sanitary and safety issues — including a lack of plumbing, water and electricity on the property that has often sheltered large amounts of people — as a reason to take possession earlier than expected.

Commission: Roscoe has raised \$4,349 in cash contributions compared to Wev's \$2,835

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Mayor Vera Katz's administration on a board that evaluated the results of policy decisions on public life.

Wev would push for more work sessions that involve citizen input, especially during the county's annual budget process, she said.

"I would like to see a commission that is more collegial and policy-focused," Wev said. "Long-term planning is kind of my forte."

Roscoe was elected to the Astoria City Council in 2005 and served until he was ousted by Drew Herzig in 2012. He has been a member of the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development

District, the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association and the Columbia River Commercial Fishing Advisory Group.

"I've been a part of this community for a long time and I've always been of service," he said. "I think my track record and my community service speaks for itself."

In May, Wev earned 43 percent of the vote compared to Roscoe's 37 percent. A third candidate, Doug Thompson, earned 20 percent.

District 3 covers parts of Astoria, Miles Crossing, Jeffers Garden, Lewis and Clark, Youngs River, Olney, Green Mountain and parts of Walluski. While Wev swept Astoria precincts in the primary, Roscoe won in rural areas.

The county commission is

nonpartisan, but party politics could play a role in the election. Wev was elected as a Democratic precinct committeeperson in May and is the vice chair of the Clatsop County Democratic Central Committee.

"I think the fact that I'm the progressive candidate in this race will go a long way in helping me," Wev said.

Campaign finance

As of Wednesday, Roscoe had raised \$4,349 in cash contributions compared to Wev's \$2,835.

Roscoe's donors include Martin Nygaard, owner of Warrenton Fiber, Kurt and Jon Englund, who run Englund Marine Group, and Pepsi of Astoria, owned by former Astoria Mayor Willis Van Dusen.

Wev's contributors include county Planning Commissioner Chris Farrar and Dr. Thomas Duncan, an Astoria doctor and the county's public health officer.

Roscoe missed the deadline to be included in the voters' pamphlet in the primary. He said he is counting on the typically higher voter turnout in November general elections, in contrast to the 38 percent showing in May.

"Our main focus is to target the group that didn't vote," he said.

Wev could benefit from a potential national surge behind women candidates this year in response to President Donald Trump. "I've had people tell me they're only voting for women this year," she said.

Merkley sues to obtain Kavanaugh papers, vote delay

By **ANDREW SELSKY**
Associated Press

SALEM — U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley filed suit Wednesday in federal court in the District of Columbia, charging that Trump administration violated the Constitution's separation of powers by withholding from the Senate 100,000 pages of documents on Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh.

The Oregon Democrat is asking the federal court to order the administration to produce the papers and to delay confirmation hearings until senators can digest them.

"This is an unacceptable violation of separa-

tion of powers and I'm standing up and filing this case to say, 'this must end,'" Merkley told reporters in a conference call from the nation's capital. "And we're seeking the court to intervene and give senators access to the nominee's record."

Kavanaugh's nomination has become more controver-

sial after three women claimed he had engaged in sexual misconduct in the 1980s when he was in high school and college.

Merkley said the women are being treated horribly, even worse than Anita Hill who testified in Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' confirmation hearings in 1991, because no investigation is being car-

ried out.

"The Senate Judiciary Committee is turning this into a 'he said-she said' presentation," Merkley said.

Asked during a conference call with reporters if he expects his lawsuit to have any effect, Merkley responded: "This is completely untested territory."



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