

Pot

continued from page 1

establish a licensing system and patient registry to protect qualifying patients, doctors and providers from criminal liability. Gregoire vetoed provisions of the bill that would have licensed and regulated medical marijuana dispensaries and producers. She also nixed a provision for a patient registry under the Department of Health.

"There's chaos and conflict

several in Seattle, where law enforcement officials have taken a lenient view of medical marijuana grows and dispensaries. Search warrant affidavits suggested the shops were fronts for illicit drug dealing and revealed that agents were looking for evidence of drug conspiracies, money laundering and guns. Similar raids occurred in Montana and California as well.

Morgan Fox of the Washington, D.C.-based Marijuana Policy Project said the petition was a "good first step" but reclassifying the drug will not "change the federal penalties for possessing, cultivating or distributing medical marijuana."

"That is the change we really need," Fox

said in a news release. "These governors should be insisting that the federal government allow them to run their medical marijuana operations the ways they see fit, which in these cases includes allowing regulated distribution centers to provide patients with safe access to their medicine and not force them to turn to illicit dealers."

The DEA has rejected prior peti-

tions seeking to reclassify marijuana, but Gregoire noted that this is the first petition signed by governors.

Gregoire also said the science on the issue has changed. The American Medical Association reversed its position two years ago and now supports investigation and clinical research of cannabis for medicinal use.

Gregoire said she was on a phone call in August with other governors in medical marijuana states and said that there was a "huge volume" of interest.

Asked why no other governors have signed onto the initial petition, Gregoire said she and Chafee wanted to take the lead on the initiative.

"I have every expectation that you will see other governors join us," she said.

Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin plans to sign the petition and write a letter in support of the proposed change, said spokeswoman Susan Allen. Gil Duran, a spokesman for California Gov. Jerry Brown, did not have an immediate comment when asked about the petition Wednesday.

"The governors in Washington and Rhode Island raise a valid conflict that needs to be resolved,"



said Eric Brown, a spokesman for Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper. "Colorado law requires we make a similar ask of the federal government by Jan. 1. We will do that. We will also continue to consult with other governors on this issue and with Colorado's attorney general before deciding whether anything else will be done."

Other governors did not immediately respond to requests from The Associated Press.

There is currently an effort in Washington state to decriminalize and tax recreational marijuana sales for adults. Initiative 502, which has been endorsed by two former Seattle U.S. attorneys and the former head of the FBI in Washington state, would create a system of state-licensed growers, processors and stores, and would

impose a 25 percent excise tax at each stage. Adults 21 and over could buy up to an ounce of dried marijuana; one pound of marijuana-infused product in solid form, such as brownies; or 72 ounces of marijuana-infused liquids. It would be illegal to drive with more than 5 nanograms of THC, the active ingredient of cannabis, per milliliter of blood.

Sponsors need to collect more than 240,000 valid signatures by Dec. 30 to place the measure before the Legislature early next year. If the Legislature doesn't take up the issue, it automatically goes to the November ballot.

When asked about the initiative, Gregoire said her focus was on medical marijuana, and how to "get relief that is safe and readily available to these patients."

'There's chaos and conflict between what the states are doing and what the Justice Department is threatening to do'

between what the states are doing and what the Justice Department is threatening to do," said Chafee, who was on Wednesday's conference call with Gregoire.

A DEA spokeswoman said officials at the agency had heard of the petition but could not comment.

Earlier this month, the DEA raided 10 storefront dispensaries in Washington state, including

Laws

continued from page 1

forced labor or services, while sex traffickers make their victims work in the sex trade. The crimes range from smuggling immigrants into the U.S. to work in restaurants or homes to forcing young women to work as prostitutes.

Holly Austin Smith said a man at a mall promised her a job after she ran away from home at age 14. She said she was swiftly brought to a motel in New Jersey where two adults gave her a dress, put makeup on her face and dyed her hair.

"Within hours I was on the streets of Atlantic City having men forced on me," said Smith, now 33 and an advocate of stricter sex trafficking laws.

Federal authorities can prosecute traffickers under the Trafficking Victims Protections Act, enacted in 2000, which carries stiff penalties. The law also created a

new visa allowing victims of the crime to become temporary U.S. residents. But prosecutors have limited resources and often have to rely on the states to crack down on the crime.

Some states have taken aggressive steps to strengthen their laws, the report said. Fifteen states now allow victims to seek civil damages from their traffickers in court. Four states - Illinois, Maryland, Nevada and New York - have laws that vacate convictions for sex trafficking victims.

Other states were criticized in the report for failing to pass strict laws.

The report also found that 10 states have yet to adopt sex trafficking laws and that 19 don't make it a crime to buy sex acts with a minor. It also found that Iowa, Massachusetts, South Carolina and

Wyoming have no laws making it a crime to use the Internet to purchase or sell sex acts with a minor.

The state definitions of illegal trafficking

Victims are sometimes smuggled in from outside the U.S., but many started out as young runaways or simply needed money

that vary from federal standards can also make it more difficult to get additional protections and services from the U.S. government, said Kirsten Widner of the Barton Child Law and Policy Center at Emory

University's School of Law.

"And if they have no definition at all, that could be a real problem," said Widner.

One high-profile battleground was Massachusetts, which for years faced pressure from advocates to enact anti-trafficking laws. In November, Gov. Deval Patrick signed a bill that would impose a life sentence on anyone found guilty of trafficking children for sex or forced labor. It also allows prosecutors to look at first-time offenders under 18 as victims rather than criminals.

"We have focused on the very people who have been victimized the most," said Attorney General Martha Coakley.

Read the rest of this story online at www.theskanner.com



Occupy

continued from page 1

belongs to the banks seems like the logical next step for the Occupy movement," said Jeff Ordower, one of the organizers of Occupy Homes.

The events reflect the protesters' lingering frustration over the housing crisis that has sent millions of homes into foreclosure after the burst of the housing bubble that helped cripple the country's economy. Nearly a quarter of all U.S. homeowners with mortgages are now underwater, representing nearly 11 million homes, according to CoreLogic, a real estate research firm.

Protesters say that banks and financial firms own abandoned foreclosed houses that could be housing

Seattle has become a leader in the anti-foreclosure movement as protesters took over a formerly boarded-up duplex last

month. They painted the bare wood sidings with green, black and red paint, and strung up a banner that says "Occupy Everything - No Banks No Landlords."

While arrests have already been made in a couple of squatting cases in Seattle and

While arrests have already been made in a couple of squatting cases in Seattle and Portland, it remains to be seen how authorities will react to this latest tactic

Portland, it remains to be seen how authorities will react to this latest tactic.

In Portland, police spokesman Sgt. Pete Simpson said he's aware that the movement called for people to occupy foreclosed

homes, but said it's difficult to distinguish between the people who would squat in homes as a political statement and those that do it for shelter.

"The vacant property issue is of concern in cities nationwide," Simpson said. "We'll treat them all as trespassers."

In Seattle, protesters took over a boarded-up warehouse slated for demolition last weekend. In an announcement, the protesters said they planned to make the warehouse into a community center, and hosted a party the night they opened the building. Police moved in soon after, arresting 16 people in the process of clearing it out.

Seattle police spokesman Sgt. Sean Whitcomb said his department sees squatting in private properties as the same violation of trespassing Occupy Seattle made

when it camped in a downtown park.

"It's no different than when people were trespassing (in the park)," Whitcomb said. "We went nights and days, letting people camp in the park. We relied on education and outreach, rather than enforcing the law to the letter."

Atlanta protesters took a more aggressive approach in trying to disrupt the home auction. The auction went on but the whistles and sirens made it difficult for the auctioneers to communicate, said Occupy Atlanta spokesman Tim Franzen.

"We don't know how many homes we saved for one more month during the holiday season," he said. "It was kind of a Christmas gift to the people."

Read the rest of this story online at www.theskanner.com

