

DRUGS: House Bill 2355 also contained language about reducing racial profiling

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Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson said he had grave concerns about the change.

"I was absolutely against it," he said. "I know the entire Oregon DA's association was against it."

He said his concerns stemmed from the lack of accurate information about hard drug use.

"One thing that always came up is sending users to prison," he said. "That doesn't happen. Possession of meth is always a probationary sentence. They don't go to prison. Dealers go, and manufacturers, but not users."

Nelson also said he was concerned that the reduction from felony to misdemeanor was misleading.

"I don't think the seriousness or consequence to society has decreased in the past month or two," he said.

Representative Greg Smith, who voted against the bill, said the legislation was meant to target a specific group.

"These were crimes primarily committed by female offenders, and this part of the legislation wanted to do everything it can to help female offenders with families or kids, and realized many of the offenses were the results of drug or alcohol abuse."

But Smith said while those were good intentions,



Photo contributed by Hermiston Police Department
A half-pound bag of crystal meth being weighed after being confiscated by the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team.

the legislation ignored some of the most direct victims of crimes committed by drug users.

"Victims have their identities stolen, or are victims of crimes people commit while on a substance," he said. "I ended up voting no, not because I don't have sympathy for the people who are victims of their own circumstances, but in my view, there has to be consequences with actions committed."

Stuart Roberts, Pendleton police chief and chair of the BENT drug team, said this bill was a response to the passage of House Bill 3194 in 2013, which aimed to lower the number of inmates going into the Oregon prison system. Specifically, he said, that bill was designed to

lower the number of women going to prison, so the state did not have to build a second women's prison.

House Bill 2355 also contained language about reducing racial profiling, requiring police departments to collect data about a person during officer-initiated pedestrian or traffic stops including race, gender, ethnicity, and the nature of the stop. The law is intended to help officers see if they are tracking a disproportionate number of minority individuals.

Local officials said the attempt to track and prevent racial profiling may be an issue for other communities, but weren't able to rationalize the issue in the same bill as decriminalization of hard drugs.

"Each community has their own demographics," said Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston. "But how decriminalizing got mixed into it is beyond me."

Nelson, too, said the issue of racial profiling by police may be more prominent on the west side of the state. He said while minorities may be more affected on average by drug offenses, it's not something he's found in Morrow County.

Nelson also worried that the reduced criminality would be accompanied by a drop in motivation for users to follow treatment plans. First-time offenders caught in possession of a hard drug, Nelson said, are offered conditional discharge, where they plead and are placed on formal probation. If they complete probation and treatment, the charge is dismissed from their record. Nelson said the promise of having a felony charge wiped from their record gave offenders an incentive to continue with treatment.

"The stigma of a felony charge is gone," he said. "In my experience, there is not the same stigma with a misdemeanor, and not the same incentive to comply with treatment."

Nelson said the new rules haven't come up too often in his work yet, but the term "usable amount" is not always clear, making it more work for an officer to determine what the charge

should be.

For methamphetamines, heroin and cocaine, a "usable amount" is defined as two grams or less.

Treatment, not decriminalization
Smith and Nelson both said the solution to the problem lay in treatment, rather than a reduction in criminalization.

"I don't believe we got any more funding for treatment," Nelson said. "We don't have a drug court, and Umatilla County doesn't have theirs anymore. Treatment is still going to be an issue."

Smith said removing the consequence at the back end of the process was not the answer.

"We need to eliminate it on the front end, add mental health counseling," he said. "I think the legislature is failing us there."

Roberts said the new law adds several more tasks for officers, which can be a challenge.

"Specifically the 'user amount,'" he said. "There's also language specific to residue. Before, it didn't matter — one ounce, 10 ounces. Now, it's layered. They have to weigh to decide whether to arrest, or to cite or not."

Unless, he said, the person has a prior drug-related offense — and to find out that information, an officer has to request the person's comprehensive

criminal history.

"It's one more step in the process," he said.

He added that they don't want field officers handling substances more than necessary, because they could be laced with fentanyl, a narcotic that can be harmful to anyone who handles it.

Roberts said while the law is designed to reduce the stigma that was causing felons problems with finding housing or jobs, it doesn't address the root of the problem.

"There have to be opportunities for finding housing or treatment," he said, adding that those things are tough to come by in rural areas.

Edmiston said while the law wouldn't alter his department's day-to-day operations much, the change would lead to an increased strain on all parts of the system, from the fire officials and medics that have to respond to drug-related calls, to the officers that have to do more legwork when they arrest someone in possession of drugs.

He added that the new law wouldn't automatically lead to positive improvement.

"We're only going to be as good as the individual agencies hold themselves accountable."

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EO file photo
Pendleton music instructor Andy Cary is currently battling a mysterious infection at OHSU in Portland.

CARY: No option to reschedule concerts

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concerned about me getting better. It's really touching."

Cary, who also plays alto sax and sings in a local jazz quartet, hopes to return to his usual healthy self soon, but the concerts, even if he recovers quickly, are history. He and Callender

will focus on rehearsing for the holiday concerts in December.

"There's no option to reschedule," Cary said.

Cary admitted he feels a little embarrassed about the steady outpouring of concern from students, family, friends and even casual acquaintances.

"My phone is always lighting up," he said. "They connect with me on social media, they send texts and emails — it's been overwhelming in all the best ways."

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U.S. government says laptops in checked bags pose fire, explosion risk

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government is urging the world airline community to ban large, personal electronic devices like laptops from checked luggage because of the potential for a catastrophic fire.

The Federal Aviation Administration said in a paper filed recently with a U.N. agency that its tests show that when a laptop's rechargeable lithium-ion battery overheats in close proximity to an aerosol spray can, it can cause an explosion capable of disabling an airliner's fire suppression system. The fire could then rage unchecked, leading to "the loss of the aircraft," the paper said.

The U.N. agency, the International Civil Aviation Organization, sets global aviation safety standards, although member countries must still ratify them. The proposed ban is on the agenda of a meeting of ICAO's panel on dangerous goods being held this week and next week in Montreal.

The FAA has conducted 10 tests involving a fully-charged laptop packed in a suitcase. A heater was placed against the laptop's battery to force it into "thermal runaway," a condition in which the battery's temperature continually rises.

In one test, an 8-ounce



FAA via AP, File
In this April 2014 file image frame grab from video, provided by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), a test at the FAA's technical center in Atlantic City, N.J.

aerosol can of dry shampoo —which is permitted in checked baggage — was strapped to the laptop. There was a fire almost immediately and it grew rapidly. The aerosol can exploded within 40 seconds.

The test showed that because of the rapid progression of the fire, Halon gas fire suppressant systems used in airline cargo compartments would be unable to put out the fire before there was an explosion, the FAA said. The explosion might not be strong enough to structurally damage the plane, but it could damage the cargo compartment and allow the Halon to escape, the agency said. Then there would be nothing to prevent the fire from spreading.

Other tests of laptop batteries packed with potentially dangerous consumer goods that are permitted in checked baggage like nail polish remover, hand sanitizer and rubbing alcohol also resulted in large fires, although no explosions.

As a result, the paper recommends that passengers shouldn't be allowed to pack large electronic devices in baggage unless they have specific approval from the airline. The paper says the European Safety Agency, the FAA's counterpart in Europe; Airbus; the International Federation of Airline Pilots' Association, and the International Coordinating Council of Aerospace Industries Association, concurred in the recommendation.

FIRE: 22 of the 42 deaths in California's fires happened in a Sonoma County wildfire

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The loss total was expected to climb "probably dramatically so," Jones told reporters, making it likely the fires also would become the costliest in California's history.

The initial insurance total covered 4,177 partial residential losses, 5,449 total residential losses, 35 rental and condominium losses, 601 commercial property losses, more than 3,000 vehicle losses, 150 farm or agricultural equipment losses, and 39 boats. Those figures included some fire losses in Southern California — several dozen structures were destroyed or damaged in an Orange County fire — though most were from the northern part of the state, agency officials said.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's estimate of homes and structures destroyed was boosted to 6,900 from 5,700 as fire crews returned to hard-hit neighborhoods and assessed remote and rural areas they could not get to earlier, spokesman Daniel Berlant said.

He said most of the newly counted destroyed buildings burned on Oct. 8 and Oct. 9 — when the wildfires broke out in wine country north of San Francisco and other nearby areas.

"The estimates are in structures and are mostly homes, but also includes commercial structures and outbuildings like barns and sheds," Berlant said.

Twenty-two of the 42 deaths in California's October fires happened in



AP Photo/Ben Margot
A sign on the chimney of a home warns looters Wednesday, after it was destroyed by wildfires in Glen Ellen, Calif. California fire officials have reported significant progress on containing wildfires that have ravaged parts of Northern California.

a Sonoma County wildfire, making it the third-deadliest in California history. A 1933 Los Angeles fire that killed 29 people was the deadliest, followed by the 1991 Oakland Hills fire killed 25.

When adjusted for inflation, the Oakland Hills fire is believed the costliest fire in California history at \$2.8 billion. It destroyed about half as many homes and other buildings as the current series of fires.

California Gov. Jerry Brown late Wednesday issued an executive order to speed up recovery efforts as fire authorities say they've stopped the progress of wildfires.

More than 15,000 people remain evacuated Thursday, down from a high of 100,000 last Saturday.

Brown's order also allowed disrupted wineries to relocate tasting rooms and suspended state fees for mobile home parks and manufactured homes.

The order extends the

state's prohibition on price gouging during emergencies until April 2018 and expedites hiring of personnel for emergency and recovery operations.

In Los Angeles County, authorities said a charred body was found on Mount Wilson, where crews were trying to surround a smoldering wildfire in steep terrain.

The male body discovered late Wednesday was recovered by the coroner's office, which will try to identify it, Sheriff's Sgt. Vincent Plair said.

California firefighters were also battling a blaze that sent smoke billowing into the college beach town of Santa Cruz.

The wildfire in steep and rugged terrain had grown to nearly half a square mile (1.3 square kilometers) and the number of houses threatened by the fire had doubled to 300.

Several firefighters suffered minor injuries.

LIBRARY: Plans to start 'selfie with my library card' contest

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account, the library is one of several city departments that has its own social media presence, along with the police department, fire department, parks and recreation and the airport. The library wants to increase its social media contacts and website visits by 10 percent each year.

Along with a social media plan, the library intends to start a "selfie with my library card" contest each year to help stoke library card membership by 5 percent each year.

Finney said library card membership is important because when people get them, they can also be informed of all the services the library has to offer. Library card membership has been flat in recent years,

with the library required to purge cards that haven't been used in three years.

Other library card membership ideas include sign-up drives during community events like school registration and the Pendleton Farmers Market and an incentive program for things like free coffee or copies.

Besides books and other media, Finney said library cards offers services such as access to information databases.

At a Tuesday council meeting, Pendleton Library Board chairwoman Rachelle Johnson said circulation has dropped from 112,263 books and media rentals per year in 2016 to 109,424 in 2017.

Johnson attributed the drop to a decrease in the

purchase of new books and media by the library, with Finney adding that circulation decreases are being seen at libraries all across the region.

In the Thursday interview, Finney said the library intends to rectify that issue by making more purchases in the coming year.

Although the strategic plan only addresses adult programming, Finney stressed that didn't mean the library was ignoring its children's programs.

Finney said the children's programming was in good shape and the strategic plan measures would be in addition to the library's current youth offerings.

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