

MARIJUANA: Oregon has collected more than \$60M in marijuana tax revenue statewide

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while continuing to rely on state and local law enforcement to act in accordance with state laws and regulations.

Sessions on Thursday said he would let federal prosecutors in each state decide where they would focus their enforcement actions, but states that have legalized marijuana were not exempt from federal drug laws.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum said the Cole memo was “helpful guidance” for the state’s efforts to legalize marijuana and called its rescission an “overreach” by the current administration.

“I value my working relationship with (Oregon U.S. Attorney Billy Williams) and I look forward to working with his office,” she said in a statement. “States up and down the West Coast, and beyond, have spoken. This is an industry that Oregonians



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Kind Leaf owner Brandon Krenzler say it will be “business as usual” at his marijuana retail store in Pendleton after U.S. Attorney General Jess Sessions announced he is rescinding the Cole memo.

have chosen — and one I will do everything within my legal authority to protect.”

However, it’s not clear that the announcement will lead to drastic changes in the way that federal officials in Oregon handle pot.

Williams said the memo directs U.S. attorneys to use

“the reasoned exercise of discretion when pursuing prosecutions related to marijuana crimes.”

“We will continue working with our federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement partners to pursue shared public safety objectives, with an emphasis on stemming the

overproduction of marijuana and the diversion of marijuana out of state, dismantling criminal organizations and thwarting violent crime in our communities,” Williams said in a statement Thursday.

Oregon’s political leaders were quick to speak out against Sessions and President Donald Trump.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said in a statement that her office would “fight to continue Oregon’s commitment to a safe and prosperous recreational marijuana market.”

“States are the laboratories of democracy, where progressive policies are developed and implemented for the benefit of their people,” Brown said. “Voters in Oregon were clear when they chose for Oregon to legalize the sale of marijuana and the federal government should not stand in the way of the will of Oregonians.”

Knute Buehler, the Republican front-runner for the

governor’s race in 2018, also released a statement that the federal government should respect the will of Oregon voters.

“Trump promised to let states set their own marijuana policies,” U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said in a statement. “Now he’s breaking that promise so that 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.”

Krenzler said Sessions’ decision was a reaction to California’s recreational pot market opening on Jan. 1 and predicted there would be significant resistance if the federal government began enforcing the law against marijuana businesses.

In fact, Krenzler thinks Sessions scrapping the Cole memo could be a turning point for marijuana legalization,

spurring Congress to take action and reverse the federal prohibition on cannabis.

“This is the official shots fired,” he said. “It’s time to change federal law.”

While marijuana was legalized across the state when Oregonians passed Measure 91 in November 2014, it was a full two years before Pendleton voters agreed to lift a ban on marijuana sales.

City staff have yet to publicly release revenue figures from Pendleton’s share of the marijuana tax and the local 3 percent tax, but Oregon has collected more than \$60 million in tax revenue statewide, according to Rosenblum.

Pendleton City Manager Robb Corbett said it would be difficult to stop the marijuana markets already in motion without a protracted legal battle. Corbett said anything he would say beyond that would be “purely speculative.”

LIBRARIES: Many branches also offer activities and classes

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video store in Echo. So we started carrying TV series, and that’s been very popular.”

Berry added that many students used to race over from school at lunchtime or after class to use the five public computers at the Echo Library, but that has slowed with the rise of smartphones. The library offers free WiFi so people can bring their own devices in to access the internet.

Some cities have only recently had access to a public library. Irrigon went through a long process to get a full facility, for years running one out of a retrofitted school bus. After many years and several challenges, the library finally opened in March 2015, sharing a building with city hall.

Barb Huwe, founder of the Friends of the Irrigon Library, spearheaded efforts to bring a library to the city several years ago, and said use has been steady.

Williams said the most important thing for librarians is to promote their offerings beyond books and internet service.

“People don’t know we do test proctoring,” she said. “Next week, if there’s freezing rain and you can’t get to BMCC for your test, you can come here, two blocks from your house, and take the test.”

Many local libraries also offer activities and classes. The Hermiston Library has a photography club, book clubs, a writer’s group and a teen advisory council. The Pendleton Library this month offers several events, such as Valentine card making and a technology class for beginners.

Berry said while formal classes haven’t been very popular at the Echo library, many people have utilized one-one-one lessons for computer skills or to use Ancestry.com, which the library pays for.

“We’re pretty much an economically deprived community. There are not a lot of businesses,” Huwe said. “So our library has kind of been a hub for the kids.” Huwe said many young people in Irrigon don’t have home computers or tablets, so the public ones at the library are always full.

“If nothing else, that’s important,” she said.

Huwe said book checkouts are consistent, as are programs like summer reading and story time.

“We provide entertainment and education for adults as well as children — which is important because nowhere else in the community provides that.”

Hermiston Public Library Director Mark Rose said that two new digital services have arrived in Hermiston. One, called Overdrive, is a collection of electronic books and audio materials that are part of a statewide service. The other, called RBDigital Magazine, is a collection of more than 60 magazine titles that anyone with a Hermiston library card can now download.

Rose said the library still faces challenges, such as reaching non-English speakers.

“[Conveying] the notion of a public trust, or resource, that really is available to everyone in the community is challenging,” he said. “How do we offer that kind of education?”

He said the library employs several multi-lingual people who can usually help patrons. But the selection of Spanish language materials is limited, said Rose.

“There are those who more and more think they can get everything they need online,” Rose said. “Everything of value online has a price tag.”

He said many services, such as databases and magazine subscriptions, are paid for by the library.

Residents of Umatilla County pay an annual fee of 36 cents per \$1,000 assessed value in taxes to the library district. That fee gives them access to all the libraries in the Sage Library System. Libraries can trade materials between branches.

A state-maintained database of public library statistics lists each facility’s annual revenue from local, state and federal funds, as well as employee salaries and the number of cardholders registered at each library. Hermiston has 10,991 registered cardholders, Pendleton has 8,514, Athena has 551 and Echo has 275.

“There are more public libraries than there are McDonald’s’ in America,” Rose said. “Which is good. Not saying anything against McDonald’s, but when you think about it, Echo and Umatilla have public libraries. Anyone from those libraries can access anything I have. That’s the beauty of the Sage system.”

He said the participation of local branches in the sharing system has made it easier for libraries to stay relevant.

“I can’t imagine how hard it would have been before that,” he said.

Rose said it’s difficult to convince some people that libraries are still useful. He said it comes down to figuring out how to access the right sources, instead of whatever pops up first on a search engine.

“It takes some knowledge and understanding to know when you have adequate quality of information — and quality is key,” he said.

Williams said libraries can also help people make sense of that information once they find it.

“You may think Google can find the answer,” she said. “But a librarian can find the right answer — the answer that actually answers your question.”



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