

Crowds line up at 1st East Coast pot shops

By STEVEN SENNE AND BOB SALSBERG
Associated Press

LEICESTER, Mass. — Customers waited in long lines, sometimes for hours, on a cold and rainy New England day to be among the first people to legally buy recreational marijuana on the U.S. East Coast.

More than two years after Massachusetts voters approved of legalizing marijuana for adults, the state's first two fully licensed pot shops opened Tuesday in Leicester and Northampton, selling strains of the plant that can be smoked; pre-rolled joints; and edibles, such as brownies and chocolate bars.

Marijuana is already sold legally in six Western states, but the long-awaited opening of recreational outlets in the East was hailed as major milestone for the cannabis industry in the U.S., with Massachusetts viewed as a potential \$1.5 billion-a-year market. Canada began legal sales last month as well.

A celebratory atmosphere ruled outside the shops, with buyers undaunted by the grim weather. Cheers went up when the stores opened at 8 a.m. sharp. One man, who dubbed himself "Potsquatch," arrived at the Northampton store adorned from head to toe in a leafy

marijuana costume.

Customers were shuttled to Cultivate, the Leicester store, from a parking lot about a mile away as police kept a visible but low-key presence outside. Customers perused offerings kept behind counters and under glass.

Kenny Boisvert, a 33-year-old Blackstone resident, was pleasantly surprised by his purchasing experience.

"It's a very nice place. It's way more than I expected," he said as he waited to pick up edibles and buds.

There were no immediate reports of product shortages at the stores, something that has plagued the initial start of recreational pot sales in some other states. Massachusetts' top marijuana regulator said the crowds appeared orderly and praised operators for doing a thorough job of preparing for the first sales.

"It's only two stores but it represents, I think, a formidable accomplishment," said Steven Hoffman, chairman of the Cannabis Control Commission, noting the panel started meeting only 14 months ago.

Some legalization advocates have been critical of the slow pace of regulation and licensing by the state, while others have faulted cities and towns for throwing up roadblocks to mar-



A man wearing a costume of "Potsquatch" poses with customers outside New England Treatment Access cannabis dispensary on the first day of legal recreational marijuana sales on Tuesday in Northampton, Mass. NETA is one of the first two shops permitted to sell recreational marijuana in the eastern United States, more than two years after Massachusetts voters approved it in 2016.

Leon Nguyen/The Republican via AP

ijuana businesses, or in some cases banning them altogether.

The commission issued final licenses Tuesday to two more retail stores, in Salem and Easthampton, which could open in the coming weeks. But as yet there are no pot shops in the greater Boston area, where more than half the state's population resides.

George Graham, of

Shelton, Connecticut, told Masslive.com he drove up Monday and got in line early at the Northampton store after spending the night at a nearby motel.

"Everybody is happy to celebrate. I think it's going to open the door to freedom for a lot of people in surrounding states," said Graham, who is registered to use medical marijuana in Connecticut but is hoping

his state will legalize recreational pot.

Democratic Gov.-elect Ned Lamont of Connecticut supports legalization and hopes it will be a priority for state lawmakers next year. Rhode Island Democratic Gov. Gina Raimondo has also said she is open to legalization.

Daquaan Hamilton, a 22-year-old student at nearby University of Mas-

sachusetts-Amherst, was among the first inside the Northampton store after beginning his wait shortly after midnight.

"There are a lot of people throughout our history who have done prison time for such minor offenses — like having weed paraphernalia, or having small amounts on them — and the fact that I can walk out of the store right now with this and not be afraid of anything that can happen to me, it's pretty great," Hamilton told *The Boston Globe*.

As the first stores opened in his state, Democratic U.S. Rep. Joe Kennedy announced he had changed his perspective on marijuana and would now push to have the federal government legalize and regulate the drug nationally.

Kennedy said he had been skeptical of legalization in the past because of concerns that marijuana could be addictive, especially for adolescents.

"At the same time, I've heard from others who see marijuana quite differently. The parent whose epileptic child needs marijuana to calm her seizures. The veteran whose trauma it eases. The black teen arrested for smoking a joint while his white friends did the same with impunity," Kennedy wrote in an opinion piece in *STAT*, a health and medical publication.

BRIEFLY

Trump provides written responses to Mueller questions

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has provided the special counsel's office with written answers to questions about his knowledge of Russian interference in the 2016 election, his lawyers said Tuesday, marking the first time Trump has directly cooperated with the investigation.

The step is a milestone in a months-long negotiation between Trump's attorneys and special counsel Robert Mueller's team over whether and when the president would sit for an interview. They represent the first time the president is known to have described to investigators his knowledge of key moments under scrutiny by prosecutors. If Mueller finds the answers satisfactory, the responses may also help stave off a potential subpoena fight over Trump's testimony.

The compromise outcome, nearly a year in the making, offers some benefit to both sides. Trump avoids, at least for now, a potentially risky and unpredictable sit-down with prosecutors, while Mueller secures a set of on-the-record statements whose accuracy the president and his lawyers will be expected to stand by for the

duration of the investigation.

"The president today answered written questions submitted by the special counsel's office," attorney Jay Sekulow said in a statement. "The questions presented dealt with issues regarding the Russia-related topics of the inquiry. The president responded in writing."

Sekulow said in a follow-up message that the legal team would not release copies of the questions and answers or discuss correspondence with the special counsel's office.

Americans, Canadians are warned: Don't eat romaine lettuce

NEW YORK (AP) — Health officials in the U.S. and Canada told people on Tuesday to stop eating romaine lettuce because of a new E. coli outbreak.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said it is working with officials in Canada on the outbreak, which has sickened 32 people in 11 states and 18 people in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

The strain identified is different than the one linked to romaine earlier this year but

appears similar to last year's outbreak linked to leafy greens.

FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said the agency doesn't have enough information to ask suppliers for a recall, but he suggested that supermarkets and restaurants should withdraw romaine until the source of the contamination can be identified.

The contaminated lettuce is likely still on the market, Gottlieb told *The Associated Press* in a phone interview Tuesday.

Caravan migrants weigh options after court blocks Trump ban

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — Migrants camped in Tijuana after traveling in a caravan to reach the U.S. were weighing their options Tuesday after a U.S. court blocked President Donald Trump's asylum ban for illegal border crossers.

Many said they have no intention of breaking the law, but were feeling pressure after anti-migrant protests in this Mexican border city amid claims by Trump and the Tijuana mayor that the caravan harbors gang members and criminals, something they strongly deny.



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