

Sessions has ‘serious questions’ about Oregon’s cannabis market

Letter to Brown outlines authority to enforce

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has alleged that Oregon may be violating the Obama administration’s requirements to keep marijuana out of the illicit market.

Sessions sent a letter to Gov. Kate Brown July 24 reiterating the Department of Justice’s authority to enforce the federal ban on marijuana and highlighting ways in which Oregon may have failed to comply with the “Cole memo.”

The memo, issued in 2013, represents the Obama administration’s policy not to prosecute the state legalized market provided that the state has a robust regulatory system that prevents leakage of the drug into the illicit market. Thus far, the Trump administration has honored the policy.

The attorney general stated that an Oregon State Police report in January raised “serious questions about the efficacy of marijuana ‘regulatory structures’” in the state. He added that the Cole memo does not preclude the Department of Justice from investigating or prosecuting violations of the federal prohibition.

“Congress has determined that marijuana is a dangerous drug and that the illegal distribution and sale of marijuana is a crime,” Sessions wrote. “The department remains committed to enforcing the Controlled Substances Act in a manner that efficiently applies our resources to address the most significant threats to public health and safety.”

Sessions, a longtime marijuana foe, did not specify



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has written a letter to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown alleging the state has not done enough to keep its regulated marijuana out of illicit channels. Sessions reiterated his authority to investigate and prosecute violations of federal marijuana laws.

how he intended to act on his authority to enforce the ban. Lauren Ehram, a Department of Justice spokeswoman, declined further comment on the purpose of the letter and the attorney general’s plans to address the concerns outlined in the letter.

Brown’s office did not respond Tuesday to multiple messages seeking comment on the letter.

Sessions wrote almost identical letters to the governors of Washington state and Colorado, according to a report by Slate on Monday. Oregon, Washington state and Colorado represent only three of the eight states that have legalized pot for recreational use, raising the question whether the federal government plans to prioritize its resources toward cracking down on the industry in those three states.

Illicit cultivation

Only about 30 percent of marijuana market activity in Oregon complies with state regulation, according to the Or-

egon State Police report.

“There is ‘pervasive illicit cannabis cultivation in the state ... (and) a strong indication that surplus cannabis is not discarded, but is in fact trafficked out-of-state and sold for a huge profit margin,’” Sessions wrote, quoting the report.

The cost and rate of burn victims from marijuana oil extraction labs and marijuana-related emergency room visits have spiked since legalization, he stated.

Meanwhile, underage users represent a majority of cannabis impairment cases on Oregon roadways, according to drug recognition data from 2013 to 2015, he wrote.

About 63 percent of Oregon adults don’t know whether it’s legal to drive after using pot, he added.

A federal task force convened to devise a legal strategy to enforce the federal ban on cannabis concluded that the Department of Justice should continue the policy of the Obama administration, according to a Thursday report

by The Associated Press.

The state Legislature earlier this year passed several laws aimed at preventing product leakage into the illegal market and fortifying the industry against federal backlash. For instance, one new law requires medical cannabis producers undergo the same stringent seed-to-sale tracking of products that the recreational industry has been subject to since legal recreational sales began in 2015. Another law orders the creation of a state hotline where authorities can verify whether a grow site is registered or licensed with the local and state government.

“Anything we can do to cut off leakage ... would put us in a stronger position” with the federal government, state Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, co-chairwoman of the legislative marijuana regulation committee, said in May.

Jobs, tax revenue

Oregon’s legal marijuana industry sustains 12,500 jobs and yields a projected \$105 million in annual recreational marijuana tax revenue, used to support public education and services, according to a white paper by Rep. Ann Lininger, D-Lake Oswego, who served on the marijuana regulation committee until July. Lininger has resigned from the Legislature and is set to be sworn in this month as a Clackamas County Circuit Court judge.

Twenty-nine states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories of Guam and Puerto Rico allow cannabis use for medical conditions. Another 17 states permit limited use of cannabidiol, or CBD, the nonpsychoactive element in marijuana.

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

Boone, Bonamici discuss energy, environment in Cannon Beach

Appearance at Chamber of Commerce breakfast

By Brenna Visser
Seaside Signal

State Rep. Deborah Boone on Tuesday, Aug. 7, praised a bill approved by the Legislature that allows electricity produced from an ocean wave-technology test site at Camp Rilea in Warrenton to be used to power the site.

Boone, a strong supporter of wave technology as renewable energy for the Oregon Coast, said initial tests conducted last summer showed promise for future growth in the industry.

The test site, funded by the Oregon Wave Energy Trust, was introduced three years ago and faced initial skepticism about impacts to crabbing and fishing industries, as well as ocean aesthetics. So far, Boone said, she has not been made aware of any negative environmental impacts.

“When we have a Cascadia event, we will not have power. We aren’t talking for three to five weeks — we are thinking three to five years,” Boone said. “So we will be relying on local energy.”

Boone, D-Cannon Beach, and U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Oregon, discussed legislative priorities and answered questions at the



COLIN MURPHEY/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici speaks to an audience of the first Community Leaders Commercial Fisheries tour in June.



State Rep. Deborah Boone speaks to Cannon Beach residents at the Chamber of Commerce, Aug. 8.

BRENNA VISSER/
SEASIDE SIGNAL

Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce’s monthly community breakfast meeting.

Bonamici discussed environmental and emergency preparedness-related bills she

had worked on this year in Congress, including a marine debris bill that would provide a funding source for research and cleanup.

The congresswoman also

celebrated the bipartisan support for legislation that would help improve weather forecasts and storm warnings.

Bonamici came to Cannon Beach to talk about local issues, but also faced questions from the audience on national topics like immigration policy, the Paris climate agreement and what it is like to be in Congress during the Trump administration.

The Cannon Beach City Council voted recently on a resolution to support the Paris accord, despite President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw. Mayor Sam Steidel asked Bonamici what kind of impacts small cities could make with resolutions like these. “It’s been heard,” she said, adding that any support helps when she still spends a significant portion of time debating the existence of climate change with some of her House colleagues.

Bonamici said she has been seeing record turnout at town hall meetings, often filled with inquiries about “polarization” in Washington, D.C.

“There are concerns about the Trump administration on both sides of the aisle,” Bonamici said. “But there are still lots of bipartisan efforts in the House.”



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Astoria U.S. Bank employees Ashley Camp, Dylan Mitchell, Jeremiah Wright; Way to Wellville Strategic Council member Debbie Morrow; and Clatsop Kids Go Coordinator Sarah Brown.

US Bank supports Clatsop Kids Go

U.S. Bank gave a \$3,500 grant to The Way to Wellville’s Clatsop Kids Go program for cultural and educational activities. The in-school program is designed to help kids develop healthy behaviors and positive attitudes around physical activity, nutrition and well-being.

The funds will be used to hire a cultural event coordinator and for field trips. Last year, students in the program visited the Seaside Museum and Fort Clatsop National Historical Park, where they enjoyed a presentation by Roberta Basch on Native American customs.

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