

## **Crime up because of medical pot, state official says**

**By CARLY FLANDRO, Chronicle Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, June 16, 2011 12:15 am**

The head of the Montana Department of Justice's narcotics bureau said Wednesday that crime has increased in 78 percent of the state's jurisdictions since medical marijuana became legal in Montana.

Mark Long told the Gallatin County Republican Women during a luncheon that crimes associated with medical marijuana have included homicides, robberies, thefts and assaults. And he added that, because the state is "saturated with medical marijuana," it's become a source for the illegal selling and purchasing of the drug.

"All marijuana used to come from Mexico and Canada," he said. "Now it's Montana, Mexico and Canada."

Long joined Bozeman Mayor Jeff Krauss and local law enforcement officials Wednesday to answer questions on the pressing issue of medical marijuana, which is facing a major overhaul on July 1 because of concerns that the drug is being abused in the state.

The panel was mediated by Tamara Hall, the organization's program director and vice chair.

Jake Wagner, the commander of the Missouri River Drug Task Force, described how caregivers have made money by selling the drug in other states. In Montana, they could sell medical marijuana for \$2,000 to \$2,500 per pound. But if they drove to Wyoming and sold it there, they could fetch double the price.

And, Wagner said, the state's medical marijuana law has changed how the drug task force operates. Before medical marijuana use ballooned in 2009, the force often initiated cases by finding marijuana. Now, Wagner said, it has "lost some traction because we don't know where to start."

Krauss said voters did not envision an industry when they approved the statewide use of medical marijuana. And in Bozeman, Krauss said there was a concern that the town

would become "a little Amsterdam." However, he added that Bozeman was able to regulate the industry as it grew through zoning and ordinances.

"Bozeman regulated it. Most Montana towns didn't," Krauss said. "Missoula is covered with casinos and pot operations. ...We were ahead of the curve big time."

Rep. Ted Washburn, R-Bozeman, attended the panel and stood to discuss Senate Bill 423, which goes into effect July 1 and will put an end to legally buying and selling medical marijuana in the state.

"A lot of people didn't like it," Washburn said of the bill. "It isn't perfect and it will come back in the next session."

The Montana Cannabis Industry Association and eight plaintiffs have filed a lawsuit to overturn the new law, claiming it violates constitutional rights. They're also seeking an injunction that would keep the new law from going into effect until the lawsuit is settled.

Hearings on the injunction are scheduled for June 20 and 21.

If the new law does go into effect, Hall asked the panelists how medical marijuana could still be made available to those who really need it.

"It'd be pretty hard to get that done," Krauss said, adding that the new law is a "de facto repeal" of the current law. "We'd have to wait until the next legislative session."

A caregiver was also supposed to have been on the panel, but was absent so Krauss took his place.

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