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Johnson: Elgin comment 'pulled out of thin air'

Gubernatorial candidate refers to Union County community in quote about violence

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

ELGIN — A remark from an Oregon gubernatorial candidate regarding a local Union County city likely meant no harm, despite its connotation.

Betsy Johnson, running as an independent candidate, commented on her thoughts about a lack of safety across Oregon in an interview with Willamette Week on Wednesday, Jan. 5 — the quote tied in Elgin, a small town at the northern end of the Grande Ronde Valley. When asked when Oregon “lost its way,” Johnson stated that Oregon citizens are not safe on the streets, regardless of what town you live in.



Johnson

with the advent of COVID. It seems to be a kind of collision of catastrophes. We’ve got 13 counties, a third of our land mass, wanting to flee to Idaho. We’ve got people not safe on this streets, whether you’re in Elgin or Laurelhurst,” Johnson told the Willamette Week.

Johnson later cleared the air, noting that Elgin was the first city on the east side of the state that she could think of at the time.



Hallgarth

“I just pulled it out of the air,” she said. “I was just thinking about a small town somewhere in Eastern Oregon.”

Johnson explained that the quote was not intended as a dig to Elgin, stating that she has visited the Northeastern Oregon town in the past.

“I’ve been to Elgin and I had Elgin on the brain,” she said. “I just purely picked it out of the air, there was nothing specific.”

Elgin Mayor Risa Hallgarth weighed in on the quote, stating

she has no idea why Johnson would mention Elgin by name in that context.

“Everybody has their problems, but I don’t feel unsafe at all here and I’ve lived here all my life,” she said. “I don’t know why she would have said Elgin, maybe because it’s small in comparison to other towns.”

Hallgarth said that while crime occurs in every city, she disagrees with tying in Elgin as unsafe.

“We don’t have gang issues or

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Bentz slams river act

Freshman congressman speaks out against legislation on U.S. House floor Jan. 11

By **RONALD BOND**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WASHINGTON — Oregon Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, denounced the River Democracy Act on the House floor Tuesday, Jan. 11, saying the legislation that would label 4,700 miles of waterways as “Wild and Scenic” would instead leave them “just waiting to be burned and ruined.”

“The overwhelming majority of my 62 county commissioners have serious and unanswered concerns about the dangers the act presents,” Bentz, a freshman congressman, said during his floor speech. “Chief among them is that this designation will prevent what needs to be done to protect these watersheds, placing them in a bureaucratic wasteland where it will take years, if not decades, to initiate and then complete plans that may or may not allow the treatment activities needed right now.”

Bentz noted that with a mile-wide corridor — a half-mile on each side of the designated areas — being marked Wild and Scenic, the area cordoned off, 4,700 square miles, would be about the size of Connecticut.

Bentz said the bill would allow just one method of fire prevention — prescribed burning — which he contended would actually increase the

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Investigation ongoing

Wallowa County may seize cattle after possible neglect

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — Wallowa County Sheriff Joel Fish said his office continues to investigate possible animal neglect by Dean Oregon Ranches and others in the stranding of cattle in the mountains during recent snowstorms.

The sheriff said he expects the investigation to take time as his office gathers statements from those involved.

“I do not have any specific number of cows that have been gathered or died,” Fish said. “The staff for Dean Oregon Ranches are collecting the cattle. Most of the cattle belong to Dean Oregon Ranches.”

County Commissioner Todd Nash, who is a rancher and often addresses agricultural issues on the Board of Commissioners, said Fish’s statement of Dec. 31 that the county was “moving toward seizing the Dean Oregon Ranch” was not exactly accurate. Nash said it’s the cattle — not the ranch itself — that may be seized, and it is unknown if the small number of cattle owned by other ranchers would be included.

“We’re looking at seizing the livestock,” Nash said. “We’re in the process of considering that.”

He said there is no timeline in sight, as the proper legal measures must be taken, such as Fish’s investigation.

“We need to have all our ducks in a row,” the commissioner said.

Wife speaks up

But Karen Dean, wife of



Anna Butterfield/Contributed Photo, File

Calves rescued from the deep snows in the Upper Imnaha get some refreshment Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022, at the Joseph-area ranch of Mark and Anna Butterfield. The livestock are among many rescued in the past week.

Bob Dean, the owner of the ranch in the Upper Imnaha area where cattle have been freezing or rescued from the winter weather for the past few weeks, was defensive of her ailing husband during a telephone interview from her Georgia home.

She said her 68-year-old husband underwent surgery in June when his oxygen was cut off and left him with brain damage. Dean placed the responsibility for the cattle’s welfare squarely on the shoulders of the ranch managers, B.J. and Emily Warnock.

“He was supposed to bring the cows down in October,” Dean said of B.J. Warnock. “They let the cows go down on their own.”

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Craig Stockdale/Contributed Photo, File

This cow had to be euthanized after being stuck in deep snow in the Upper Imnaha area in late December 2021. A massive effort to rescue the cows and their calves owned by Dean Oregon Ranches has been made by ranch workers, county officials and volunteers.

A final ballot looms

Robin Church is set to retire as Union County Clerk

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Five decades ago Robin Church, then 18, knew she was about to become part of history when she stepped into an Elgin polling booth to participate in the presidential election of Nov. 7, 1972.

What Church did not know was she was getting a

glimpse of her future.

Church joined the Union County clerk’s office in 1991 and was appointed Union County clerk in 2007 to fill the unexpired term of Nellie Bogue-Hibbert, who stepped down to become a Union County commissioner. Church was first elected Union County clerk in 2009. She has helped count more than

750,000 ballots during her career. Church announced Wednesday, Jan. 5, she will retire in early January 2023.

“I’ve always liked the job,” she said. “Everyday time flies by. There is always something different.”

Looking back to that day in 1972, when she was

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Union County Clerk Robin Church, who has worked at the county clerk’s office since 1991, will retire in early 2023.

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section	
Tonight 34 LOW Mostly cloudy	Friday 39/30 Mostly cloudy

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SATURDAY LATE-SEASON UPLAND BIRD HUNTING

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