

# Only one certainty in governor's race: The 3 candidates will debate

By **JULIA SHUMWAY**  
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — The three women running for governor of Oregon will debate each other before the November election. When, where and what about remains undetermined.

Debates about debates heated up over the past couple weeks, with Democrat Tina Kotek calling for a forum solely dedicated to gun violence and unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson seeking televised debates in all areas of the state. Republican Christine Drazan is reviewing every proposal.

Kotek on Thursday, June 30, slammed Johnson and Drazan for not responding to her call for a gun violence forum in the wake of a mass shooting at a Texas elementary school.

Kotek, the former speaker of the Oregon House, supported gun control laws including expanded background checks and preventing people convicted of domestic abuse from obtaining guns, while Johnson voted against those measures as a Democratic state senator. Drazan, who was the Republican House leader from 2019 to 2021, voted against legislation requiring safe gun storage and touts an "A" rating from the National Rifle Association.

"Right now, Oregonians are looking for leaders who will have the courage to stand up to the NRA and fight to reduce gun violence," Kotek said in a statement. "Representative Drazan and Senator Johnson's silence makes it clear that they would rather cater to the gun lobby than stand up for common-sense policies to prevent gun violence."

Johnson's communications director, Jennifer Sitton, said Johnson assumed Kotek's call for a gun violence forum was a "political ploy" on Kotek's part.

Drazan campaign manager Trey Rosser declined to say whether Drazan will participate in a forum about gun violence, but said in an emailed statement that Drazan looks forward to debates that will give her the opportunity to compare Kotek, Johnson and Gov. Kate Brown.

"Christine looks forward to comparing and contrasting her record and her vision for Oregon with the two career Democrats that are expected to be on the ballot this November," Rosser said. "We will be reviewing all proposed debates with a commitment to ensuring they are fair and balanced and look forward to participating in as many as possible."

Earlier in June, Johnson asked for debates in Bend, Coos Bay, Eugene, Medford, Pendleton and Portland along with a previously agreed-to debate hosted by the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association.

Kotek countered with a proposal for forums in Eugene, Salem, Portland, Medford and Hermiston, as well as a debate hosted by Oregon Public Broadcasting without a set location.

Both campaigns said they're finalizing details over debates. Kotek communications director Katie Wertheimer said Kotek would consider participating in issue-specific forums proposed by other campaigns.

# Oregon voters may decide new firearms requirements

By **PETER WONG**  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Only two initiatives appear likely to qualify for a statewide vote Nov. 8 as Oregon's deadline approaches for petitioners to submit signatures.

That deadline is Friday, July 8. The state Elections Division will have up to 30 days afterward to verify signatures, generally done with sampling.

The mass shootings in Buffalo, N.Y., and Uvalde, Texas, have given momentum to advocates of a measure to set new requirements for firearms permits and limit ammunition magazines to 10 rounds each.

At the end of May, they had submitted barely 2,500 of the 112,020 signatures required to qualify it for the statewide ballot. One week before the deadline, that total had shot up to around 120,000 — and a chief petitioner says the goal is 140,000.

The Rev. Dr. W.J. Mark Knutson, pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church in Portland, said a wet spring and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic slowed signature-gathering efforts by 500 volunteers.

Then came Buffalo, where 10 Black people were shot dead May 14 in a supermarket, and Uvalde, where 19 children and two teachers died 10 days later at Robb Elementary School.

"People were saying they could not sit anymore, so we had 1,000



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**Oregon lawmakers and civic groups plan to push for gun law changes on the ballot and in the Capitol.**

new volunteers come forward to join the 500," Knutson said in an interview. "A lot were parents with children — it was pretty amazing. They are learning about democracy.

"The process is as important as the result — democratic action by the people. In this nation right now, we need to see democracy at work."

In addition to the limit on ammunition magazines, the measure would require people to undergo classroom and live-fire training before they obtain a firearms permit, and complete background checks. (Current law allows a purchaser to obtain a gun even if the check is incomplete after three

days; the measure would require the check to be completed.)

The other initiative awaiting qualification for the ballot is a proposed constitutional amendment to bar legislators from seeking re-election if they have 10 or more absences that have not been excused by the Senate president or House speaker. Advocates have submitted 183,942 signatures; the requirement for a constitutional amendment is 149,360.

Public employee unions led the drive for the measure after walkouts by minority Republicans stymied legislative action in 2019 and 2020. The 2020 walkouts forced the majority Democrats to scuttle proposed climate-change legisla-

tion and shut down the short session. (Republican senators walked out for one day in 2021; Republicans in the House were deterred from doing so by a 2021 rule that set a maximum daily fine of \$500 for an unexcused absence.)

The Oregon Constitution pegs signature requirements to a share of the votes cast for governor in the most recent election. It's 6% for an initiative, which changes state law, and 8% for a constitutional amendment.

Voters also will see two constitutional amendments referred by the 2021 Legislature. One would define health care as a right; the other would remove slavery as a punishment for crime.

The Lift Every Voice Oregon movement also had another initiative to ban assault weapons. Though technically still alive, Knutson said advocates chose to focus their efforts on the other measure.

"That one will save more lives," he said. "The permit (requirement) applies to every gun. People right now can buy guns with no training, no knowledge of how they work and no understanding of what they can do."

The limit on magazines, he said, "would take the ammo from assault weapons."

Assuming that the measure qualifies for the ballot and voters pass it, he said, advocates will take a version of the assault-weapons ban to the 2023 Legislature.

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