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INSIDE



HUCKLEBERRY FESTIVAL EXPANDS TO 2 DAYS IN **GO!**

Voters: Debate season is about to begin

Oregon governor candidates will make pitches starting July 29

By **HILLARY BORRUD**
The Oregonian

SALEM — Debate season for the Oregon governor's race will kick off Friday, July 29, with Democrat Tina Kotek, Republican Christine Drazan and unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson all scheduled to participate in the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association debate.

The debate will take place in Welches at 2 p.m. and be streamed live online by The Oregonian/OregonLive. It's the start of what could be a busy calendar of debates for the three former state lawmakers running to be Oregon's next governor.

So far, the only other debate that all three women have committed to participate in will be hosted by NBC affiliate KOBI in Medford, according to their campaigns. Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, and former Rep. Knute Buehler, a Republican, faced off in three debates in 2018.

Oregon voters are in for a highly unusual governor's race this year between three viable candidates.

It is rare for third-party or unaffiliated candidates for governor to line up the big money and political professionals necessary to mount a serious campaign, but Johnson has done so. Johnson, who served as a Democratic state lawmaker from 2000 until 2021, left the Democratic party last year in order to run unaffiliated. She supports abortion rights and voted with Democrats on many issues, but also joined Republicans to oppose high-profile Democratic priorities including gun regulations and a greenhouse gas cap-and-trade plan.

To get on the November ballot, she must collect signatures from a number of voters equal to 1% of the votes in the last presidential election, which equals 23,743 valid voter signatures. She has raised \$9.4 million and has \$4.5 million on-hand, according to state campaign finance records.

Kotek, who won the Democratic primary in May, was elected to the state House in 2006 and served as House Speaker from 2013 until she stepped down from the Legislature in early 2022 to focus on running for governor. Under Kotek's leadership, majority Democrats in the House passed a

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The top candidates for governor continue to pile up stacks of cash in the race to the top of Oregon's political pyramid. **Page A8**



Dick Mason/The Observer

Mark Girard poses with his yellow Labrador retriever, Bo, on Tuesday, July 26, 2022, in Union. For the last few years, Girard has spent about \$2,000 a year on spaying and neutering the cats that show up at his farm.

Dogged patrol for FERAL CATS

Union man wants community to address growing problem of county's stray cats

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION — Mark Girard, a retired Union hobby farmer, has an easy time monitoring the number of new feral kittens coming on his property thanks to Bo, his four-year-old yellow Labrador retriever.

The friendly canine begins barking and leads Girard to the newcomer. "Bo goes on point," Girard said. "She does not want to hurt it. She wants me to know it is there."

The yellow Lab in the past two years has been leading Girard to more feral kittens on his property than he would like. Girard said people are stopping outside his farm and letting cats out. The cats put him in a bind because there is nowhere he can take the felines — he said the La Grande

animal shelter operated by the Blue Mountain Humane Association does not accept feral cats.

"The bottom line is that there is no place to take them," Girard said.

Maria Carmichael, vice president of the Blue Mountain Humane Association's board of directors, said the animal shelter does not accept feral cats because they can spread disease and they typically are not adoptable because of their antagonistic dispositions.

"You cannot tame a feral cat," Carmichael said.

Addressing the problem

Girard said the problem he is experiencing in dealing with feral cats is shared by many in Union County. It is why he is encouraging people to join forces and address the area's cat problem. One option would be to develop a low-cost spay and neuter clinic, where people could bring in cats and pay on a sliding scale based on their income.

Girard believes there is a core of local animal lovers who could make such a program, or other alternatives, become a reality.

"A lot of people here have good intentions. They need to rally together to get it done," he said.

Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen, who Girard has asked for advice, agrees that there is a cat problem in the county.

"There are feral cats everywhere," Bowen said.

The sheriff said it is important to remember that any solution will ultimately involve money.

"It all falls back on funding," he said.

The sheriff said he will be working with Union County Commissioner Matt Scarfo on the issue. The commissioner is now in the process of contacting other counties and cities to see how they are addressing feral cat populations. Scarfo said he wants to be careful before spending money on a program until he is confident it will make an impact.



Bowen



Scarfo

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Firebreaks helped to stop June blaze

Officials say firebreaks built 22 years ago, and maintained annually, gave firefighters a major assist containing Oregon's 40,000-acre Willowcreek Fire

By **CLAYTON FRANKE**
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — A tractor that plowed swathes through rangeland in northern Malheur County more than two decades ago is a major reason why the Willowcreek Fire, the biggest blaze in the area so far this year, stopped when it did in late June, according to officials from the Bureau of Land Management's Vale District.

A series of firebreaks dug 22 years ago made "all the difference with suppression efforts on the Willowcreek Fire," according to a July 15 press release.

The blaze, which started on private land north of Vale on June 28 and burned 40,274 acres, mostly on that day and the next, was fully contained as of July 11, said Larisa Bogardus, public affairs officer for the Vale District.

The cause of the fire is still

under investigation, Bogardus said. The fire didn't burn any structures and no one was hurt. The fire burned about 24,400 acres of private land, 15,300 acres of public land managed by the BLM and about 572 acres of state ground.

Flames likely would have spread across more of the sagebrush and grass range if not for those firebreaks, said Marcus Johnson, who was incident commander on the Willowcreek Fire.

"As an incident commander, it's a huge benefit for us because a lot of us know where these lines are and have a good idea of where we

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Kristen Munday/BLM, File

An aerial photo shows how Oregon's Willowcreek fire in late June 2022 was stopped when it reached a firebreak that was made about 22 years ago. The break is maintained annually.



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Tonight
64 Low
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HOT

Friday
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Very hot

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