Betsy Johnson

Christine Drazan

Tina Kotek

A HISTORIC RACE

Q&A with Oregon's three candidates for governor

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

On Nov. 8, Oregonians will elect a new governor.

Several factors make this race unique and explain why it's garnering national attention.

First, many Oregonians are disenchanted with the state's current leadership. Outgoing Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, is America's least popular governor, according to a 2022 poll from the data firm Morning Consult.

The race is also capturing national interest because it's a tight contest. Sabato's Crystal Ball at the University of Virginia Center for Politics, a nonpartisan newsletter with a high rate of accuracy in predicting election results, labeled Oregon's outcome as a "toss-up."

Oregon is hosting an unusual three-way race among a trio of women who are all recent members of the state legislature: former state House Speaker Tina Kotek, running as a Democrat; former House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, running as a Republican; and former state Sen. Betsy Johnson, running as unaffiliated, formerly a moderate Democrat.

If Kotek wins, she will be America's first out lesbian governor. If Drazan wins, she will be the first Republican to win an Oregon gubernatorial race since 1982. If Johnson wins, she will be the first independent governor to win since 1930.

The Capital Press sat down with each of the candidates to talk about issues that matter to rural Oregonians. Each candidate answered the same set of questions.

The candidates' answers have been shortened for readability. Words in parenthesis are written by the Capital Press to add context and clarity. Follow-up questions are indicated in italics.

Capital Press: If you are elected, how do you plan to bridge the political divide between Oregon's urban and rural communities?

Johnson: "Well, show up is the first one. We've just come back from a trip to Eastern Oregon. I think being there is important and understanding that whether you're making silicon chips, or wood chips, or potato chips out in Boardman, or fish and chips in Astoria, that we have throughout Oregon different micro-economies, and the governor needs to understand that."

Drazan: "The opportunity to bring Oregonians together is a big part of why I'm running. When we have a Portland focus and hard, progressive Democrat agenda, you end up taking that agenda and you impose it on the rural parts of the state.

"Too often in the public policy-making process, you have folks drive six or eight hours to Salem and testify for two or three minutes. No one asks them questions and their proposals do not change outcomes because this single party control machine — they've got the votes.

"Having a Republican governor ensures (lawmakers) have to compromise. They have to listen to the stakeholders, because if they don't, they'll get a veto in my administration."

Kotek: "For me, it is about how you listen to people, making sure you're out in local communities, engaging with local leaders.

"As speaker of the House, it was really important for me to represent the entire state. I made a point to encourage my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans, to visit each other's districts.

"As governor, getting out of Salem more often — it's important. You bring people together by listening. And focusing on issues that I don't think are very partisan. Every part of this state has a housing problem. That's not a partisan issue. I honestly think water's not a partisan issue. We all need water.

"So, focusing on issues that aren't highly politicized is a good place to start."

123RF
The Oregon Capitol

Inslee-Murray report: Snake River dam breaching not feasible now

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Breaching the lower Snake River dams is not "a feasible or responsible option" until their energy or economic benefits can be replaced, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said in releasing a report he and U.S. Sen. Patty Murray commissioned.

But state and federal governments should come up with a plan to replace the benefits of the dams to enable breaching to move forward, Inslee said in a press release.

Inslee and Murray, both Democrats, released their final report evaluating the feasibility of breaching the dams Aug. 25.

"We must recognize that breaching the dams does in fact offer us the best chance at protecting endangered salmon and other iconic species that run through these waters," Inslee stated. "But the hydropower and economic benefits of the dams are significant, and breach-

Getty Images
The spillway at Lower Monumental Dam in Washington on the Snake River.

ing them before we have other systems in place to replace those benefits would be disastrous."

"...It's clear that breach is not an option right now — while many mitigation measures exist, many require further analysis or are not possible to implement in the near-term," Murray said. "Importantly, the Pacific Northwest cannot delay its decarbonization goals as we confront the climate crisis. Key infrastructure and energy investments must be in place before we can seriously consider breach."

But specific salmon runs are "struggling," and breach-

ing is "an important option that could help save the salmon," Murray said. "We cannot under any circumstances allow the extinction of salmon to come to pass."

Many of the actions required to mitigate and replace the dams' benefits will require federal and congressional action, Inslee and Murray said.

"Status quo is not an option," Inslee's office said in a press release. "Changing economic, energy and climate conditions requires leaders to plan for changing circumstances in the Columbia Basin region during the coming decades."

Saving salmon and other species in the Columbia Basin is "imperative," Inslee said.