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The Oregon Capitol

Governor

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we should continue to invest in that. (The program allows states, counties or tribes to do forest, rangeland and watershed restoration projects on federal lands.)

“I think we should make more of our forestlands available for logging. We’re either gonna manage (our forests) or we’re gonna watch (them) burn.”

KOTEK: “My baseline is: Talk to the experts. OSU (Oregon State University) is a huge resource for us, understanding what the experts at OSU think we should be doing.

“I believe we do need some level of prescribed burning, and it has to be done safely.

“In terms of overall forest practices, the Private Forest Accord is a template of how we can improve forest practices.” (The accord was a deal that timber and conservation groups reached last fall.)

Where does Kotek stand on logging and grazing?

“I don’t have a particular agenda on either of those issues because I’m not an expert,” she said.

Kotek says solving Oregon’s housing crisis is a top priority. Does she support using timber harvested from Oregon’s forests to build houses?

“We’re gonna have to build 36,000 housing units per year for the next decade to actually meet our gap and get ahead of it,” she said. “I love the cycle of using Oregon-based mass timber to construct homes. Mass timber is a very viable product that we have to promote.”

CP: Many family farmers say the farmworker overtime pay rule, which passed during the 2022 legislative session, will hurt their businesses. Do you have plans to amend the law?

JOHNSON: “Let’s start from the premise of: Increasing the safety and

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DRAZON: “It was absolutely a mistake to keep schools closed as long as they were.”

KOTEK: “I think it was important that we instituted public health requirements that kept people safe, and frankly, alive. There are a lot of people walking around today because we tried to do the right thing.”

wages and working conditions of low-income workers is a laudable goal. OK. This bill, I think, was an overly simple solution to a really complicated issue.

“My concern is that good intentions can’t mandate good jobs. I think we’re gonna have all sorts of work-around schemes, (employers) capping (employees’) hours, or it will create a highly transient workforce. I’m just not sure that it was thought out as carefully as it should have been for a policy change of this magnitude.”

Does she plan to change the law?

Johnson did not name specific plans but said amendments might relate to “highly perishable crops” such as grapes.

DRAZON: “Yeah, absolutely. I look forward to the opportunity to find a more balanced approach to that issue. With single-party control, the needs of all stakeholders were not taken into consideration with the passage of that legislation. It does need to be reworked and amended.”

Does Drazon have specific amendments planned?

Drazon did not outline a plan, but said: “I look forward to having the conversation and proposing a more responsive piece of legislation that allows Oregon ag to continue to be Oregon ag.”

KOTEK: “Before I left the Legislature, we were gearing up for this conversation in last year’s session. I had dairy farmers calling me up saying, ‘This isn’t

working for us.’ I listened hard. Before I left the Legislature, I said, ‘Look, we have to transition this in a way that helps farmers to do their business.’

“It was very important to me to have a reasonable transition (timeframe) plus resources to support farmers — the tax (credit). I am definitely open to maintaining the (tax credit). (The law includes temporary tax credits for employers to cushion costs.) But it would be nice if the federal government solved this. From a competitive standpoint, it would be good if every state was doing this. It’s the right thing to do.”

CP: Was it a mistake to shut down schools and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic?

JOHNSON: “Hell, yes.

“I think we did enormous damage. I don’t think we’ve measured the social, emotional, mental health and academic damage that we’ve done to our kids.

“A lot of the hospitality industry is not going to recover. We’ve dissipated the workforce. And our response to the distribution of money was not consistent or objective.”

What would she have done differently?

“I would have approached the issue with more humility,” she said. “I would have talked to county commissioners and city councilors and mayors. If you don’t have the affected people’s opinion(s), you just have what emanates out of Salem.

“My reaction to what happened was that the agencies were punitive (and) retaliatory. They didn’t work with business to try to prescribe the safest conditions for patrons and workers. Rather, they just had their little regulatory Bigger Book of Bureaucracy out, running around trying to tell people what they were doing wrong.”

What if there’s another pandemic?

Johnson said she plans to be better prepared with personal protective equipment on hand and “clearer lines of communication.”

DRAZON: “I’m a mom of three kiddos. I had my daughter at home online trying to teach herself algebra in middle school. It was absolutely a mistake to keep schools closed as long as they were.

“Those first days where we did not fully understand how to navigate COVID, who was at risk, how this was going to move through our communities. ... As House Republican leader, I sent a letter to the governor on behalf of our caucus saying: Whatever you need, however we can work with you, we need to do everything we can to protect public health.

“And that suddenly became: She did whatever she wanted. And she mandated everything. I think that the duration of that shutdown was heavy-handed and was an absolute abysmal failure.”

What will Drazon do differently if there’s a future pandemic?

“I’d give more local control to our school boards with recommendations,” she said.

And businesses?

“And businesses,” she said. “You can trust Oregonians with the best information and the most support possible to make the right choices for themselves, their customers, their clients and their families.”

KOTEK: “There was certainly disagreement across the state on how best to do this.

“I think it was important that we instituted public health requirements that kept people safe, and frankly, alive. There are a lot of people walking around today because we tried to do the right thing.”

Will Kotek keep schools and businesses open moving forward?

“The number one priority to me is, no matter what, we have to keep our schools open. We have to have students in person,” said Kotek.

What about businesses?

“I think one of the things (that) didn’t go well is you can’t tell businesses they are open and give them 48 hours and say, ‘Oh, and you’re closing in two days.’ You have to give people advance warning,” said Kotek. “It’s important to have businesses part of the conversation and give them adequate notice whenever you’re gonna do something that could impact their business.”

CP: Rural economies are largely based

on agriculture and natural resource industries. What do you see as the ideal jobs of the future in rural Oregon?

JOHNSON: “I think that industry in rural places is doing it. Walking through the plywood mill in Elgin, realizing how much of that is now computer-driven.

“We’re innovating new products we had never even dreamed of. Oregon is uniquely positioned to do the things we’ve already talked about — thinning, logging — but also, I think we’re uniquely positioned to innovate.”

DRAZON: “Across every generation, you see the evolution of community. What we have to continue to protect and preserve, though, is the autonomy of local communities.

“We live in a free society. That is the beauty of our nation — its independence. Oregonians should have the right to choose for themselves and their families their best lives.

“And I frankly don’t believe there is a future for our state and nation without rural communities that continue to provide the values and benefits that our agricultural community has provided for centuries.”

KOTEK: “I’m super bullish about the strides we’re making on broadband infrastructure. The other issue for me is clean energy jobs.

“We have to produce more clean energy in our state. That is jobs for rural Oregonians. That is large-scale solar. It’s offshore wind. It’s the pumped storage (hydropower) facility down in Klamath.

“One of the things about large-scale solar in particular (is) finding properties that are on low-grade or low-value farmland. We have to protect the land use system.

“So, clean energy jobs and broadband (are) very important and supporting our traditional industries as well.”