

IN BRIEF

Astoria Bridge temporarily closed after man climbed to top

A man who climbed to the top of the Astoria Bridge on Saturday afternoon came down safely after more than an hour. Police closed the bridge to traffic, which backed up on both the Astoria and Washington state sides of the Columbia River. Around 4 p.m., police received a report that a vehicle had parked on the bridge after driving erratically up to it. The driver left the vehicle and began climbing the structure. A friend of the man's family and Officer Alex Whitney, of the Astoria Police Department, went up the structure to talk with him. Whitney asked the man to come closer. "And he's like, 'OK,' and started walking down," Astoria Police Chief Stacy Kelly said. The man climbed down just before 5:15 p.m. The bridge reopened minutes later. The man was taken to Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria. No criminal charges are pending, Kelly said. The man had been listed as a missing person. Police said he has a history of mental health challenges and ascended the Astoria Bridge in March, as well.

Fire at Astor Building causes minor damage

A fire on the seventh floor of the Astor Building caused minor, mostly smoke damage on Saturday afternoon. The apartment building on 14th Street downtown was briefly evacuated. Shortly afterward, all residents, except those who live on the seventh floor, were allowed to return. The resident of the apartment where the fire started was not home at the time, Astoria police said. No injuries were reported. The Astoria Fire Department will determine the cause of the fire, police said.

County residents invited to participate in internet speed test

Clatsop County residents are invited to take a one-minute internet speed test in an effort to improve internet access in Oregon. The test will help Faster Internet Oregon — a collaboration among economic development districts and other agencies — locate the gaps in the state's internet services. The results will be used to enhance broadband infrastructure. The project in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties, and the western Washington County area, is being led by the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District, which encourages people to participate as soon as possible. "Currently, the only data we have for the availability and speed of internet connections is inaccurate," Col-Pac said in a statement. "With enough tests in the region, we can use this data to advocate for internet infrastructure funding to improve fast and affordable internet services." Participants must test with a home internet connection, not with a cellular or VPN, the organization said. People without a home internet connection can use their cellphone to report zero internet access at their location. No identifying information besides a participant's address will be shared, Col-Pac said. People can go to www.fasterinternetoregon.org to participate and for more information.

— *The Astorian*

Family of Hillsboro couple killed in Pier 39 crash suing carmaker, repair shops

The family of a Hillsboro couple killed in a crash in Astoria is suing their carmaker and several repair shops. The lawsuit seeks \$50 million in wrongful death restitution. The estates of Wenyi Chen and Yuzhi Fei say the couple's Honda CRV accelerated by itself — causing it to crash through the railing on Pier 39 and plunge into the Columbia River back in August 2020. The lawsuit claims the car had accelerated on its own three times before that. The suit states it was taken to Hillsboro Honda twice and Beaverton Honda once for repairs.

— *KOIN*

MEMORIALS

Saturday, July 23

BACKER, William Carl (Bill) — Celebration of life from 2 to 4 p.m., Seaside Golf Course, 451 Avenue U in Seaside.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Port of Astoria Commission, 4 p.m., 10 Pier 1, Suite 209.
Seaside Planning Commission, 7 p.m., work session, City Hall, 989 Broadway.

WEDNESDAY

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, 10 a.m., work session, (electronic meeting).
Seaside Tourism Advisory Committee, 3 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.
Seaside Tree Board, 4 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

THURSDAY

Seaside Restoration Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

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Next governor will have a big say in abortion rights

Chief executive can set the policy tone

By **LAUREN DAKE**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Across the country, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn the constitutional right to an abortion has reshaped contests for governor, raising the stakes for a role that could serve as the last line of defense in protecting a pregnant person's right to choose.

But in Oregon, after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, advocates and politicians hailed the state as a sanctuary for those seeking access to an abortion. Oregon has some of the strongest protections in the country and politicians promised it would continue to be a safe haven for those who come from more restrictive states.

Those on the front line of the battle to retain access to abortion warn, however, that Oregon is not immune to the political shifts that caused the downfall of *Roe v. Wade*.

"There is absolutely a sense of complacency in our state that the fact that abortion is legal and it will remain legal," said Grayson Dempsey, who has worked in the reproductive rights arena for years. "It would be silly to think five hours to the east they are passing laws to imprison abortion doctors and passing bans at six weeks, and we're totally fine because we have this state line."

This November is expected to be a red wave year across the country, and Oregon's next governor could have a consequential influence on the future of abortion care in state. Of the three major candidates, two favor unrestricted access to abortion. One, the Republican, called Oregon's abortion laws "among the most extreme in the country."

Depending on which woman wins the job, future conversations about abortion rights — and other privacy-related issues — could look very different in the state.

It's not simply a matter of whether a candidate is for or against access to abortion services.

The next governor will be instrumental in determining how much state money is invested in reproductive health care. The governor holds the power to both propose and veto budgets, which in Oregon have often carved out money for reproductive rights. Gov. Kate Brown, who cannot run again due to term limits, has also been supportive



Oregon Public Broadcasting
Tina Kotek, the Democratic candidate for governor; Betsy Johnson, the independent candidate; and Christine Drazan, the Republican candidate, are pictured.

of using taxpayer dollars, part of a \$15 million health equity fund, to help people from other states get an abortion in Oregon.

Former state Sen. Betsy Johnson, who is running as an unaffiliated candidate, has a long record of supporting abortion access. Still, she does not support using Oregon tax dollars to help people from other states access an abortion.

"Oregon tax dollars should be spent on Oregonians," said Johnson, a former chair of the legislative budget-writing committee.

The Republican candidate for governor, former House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, said she opposes using state money to help people access an abortion, no matter if it's a resident of Oregon or another state.

Former House Speaker Tina Kotek, the Democratic contender, said she supports continuing the policy of using Oregon state funds to help people from more restrictive states access an abortion here. Kotek said Oregon has long been a leader in the reproductive rights arena and she would further that legacy.

Sets the tone

The governor also sets the tone on topics such as abortion.

After justices struck down *Roe v. Wade*, Gov. Brown announced she was creating a "West Coast offense" with the governors of Washington state and California. The idea: to make the Democratically-controlled West Coast a safe haven for people in other states seeking an abortion.

Brown has also made it clear, as some other states move to criminalize abortions, that she will not direct state law enforcement to help extradite any individual who comes to Oregon to

receive an abortion.

Christel Allen, the executive director with ProChoice Oregon, said advocates are always working behind the scenes to stop efforts to restrict access.

In 2017, Oregon lawmakers codified the right to access an abortion into state law.

Like any law, it could be undone, changed or chipped away by adding barriers that limit access.

"I think folks ... might not recognize the amount of vigilance that organizations and advocates have been working on for the past 45 years," Allen said. "We have a dozen abortion bans introduced every (legislative) session."

Most never receive a legislative hearing.

"That's because we have (Democratic) majorities, and it's been a moment since we have had a Republican or anti-choice governor," Allen said.

When Lois Anderson, the executive director of Oregon Right to Life, heard the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, her reaction was one of joy, she told Oregon Public Broadcasting's "Think Out Loud." Anderson said her group is working on a bill for the 2023 legislative session to ban abortions later in pregnancy.

And, she noted, "there is no right to abortion in the constitution."

On this point, too, the three candidates could chart vastly different paths. Both Kotek and Johnson said they support the idea of enshrining the right to access an abortion in the state constitution.

Oregon Public Broadcasting asked Drazan whether she would support a constitutional effort to enshrine the right to abortion and other civil rights. She declined to answer and instead offered a statement

from her spokesperson:

"Our campaign is focused on addressing high gas prices, homelessness, crime and our failing schools. Christine has never shied away from her pro-life values and her affirmation of marriage equality is well established."

Drazan's statement makes sense politically. For Republicans, it's politically smarter to focus on the array of other pressing issues on which Democrats might seem more vulnerable to voters: the economy, a spike in gas prices, public safety and crime.

But for Democrats, it's advantageous to argue civil liberties are on the ballot and to mobilize voters who fear more rights being rolled back.

Rank lower

John Horvick, with the polling firm DHM Research, said surveys generally show abortion rights continue to rank lower on the scale of importance to voters than some of the economic issues. After a major news event, such as the Supreme Court decision, there is some fluctuation in voter concerns, but it's often fleeting, Horvick said.

After justices struck down *Roe v. Wade*, Oregon politicians tweeted and sent out press releases. There were large, but limited, public protests. Someone hurled a Molotov cocktail at the Oregon Right to Life building.

But overall, the debate over personal freedom in the hotly-contested governor's race has remained relatively muted.

With about four months to go before the election, however, that could change. Despite what stance they take, both sides agree the Supreme Court ruling was just one step in an ongoing battle.

Johnson faces questions about her handling of a 2013 car crash

Former senator's lawyers claimed she had immunity

By **HILLARY BORRUD**
The Oregonian



Former state Sen. Betsy Johnson, who is running for governor as an unaffiliated candidate, is under scrutiny for her handling of a 2013 car crash in which Johnson rear-ended and injured another driver who was coming to a stop at a red light in Scappoose.

At the time, news reports focused on Johnson's serious injuries, which caused her to miss more than a month of the Legislative session and use a wheelchair for six months.

It escaped notice that Johnson, through her lawyers, subsequently cited her position as a state lawmaker to argue that the driver Johnson rear-ended, Melissa Gallentine, could not sue Johnson

for personal injury because she was driving as part of her official work duties.

Willamette Week first reported Johnson's efforts to avoid responsibility in the case, primarily highlighting a different but related argument Johnson made, that she was shielded from being served with a lawsuit during a legislative session.

When Johnson pushed for a judge to drop her as a defendant and leave only her employer, the state, to answer for the crash, the Oregon Department of Justice, led by Ellen Rosenblum, did not object.

But Gallentine's lawyers argued a judge, not Rosenblum's office, should determine whether Johnson's inattentive driving in Scappoose was in fact part of her official duties as a legislator.

"A simple 'I'm sorry' and 'I'm responsible' would have been greatly appreciated," Gallentine said by phone this month. "(Johnson) just kept forcing more the other aspect which was, 'I didn't do anything wrong' and trying to win a case, to show zero fault."

Johnson has pledged that if elected governor, she will emphasize personal responsibility — specifically for Oregon's homeless residents — and push for more government accountability.

Christine Drazan, the Republican nominee for governor, weighed in on social media. "This is a clear abuse of legislative immunity. No one should be above accountability or above the law, especially those in power. Orego-

nians are tired of self-serving politicians. We deserve leaders who follow the law and tell the truth," she tweeted.

Democratic nominee for governor Tina Kotek also issued a statement on Johnson. "Sen. Johnson certainly suffered a serious injury, but her callous indifference to Ms. Gallentine's injuries and her weaponizing of legislative immunity to bully an Oregonian is truly shocking," the former state House speaker said. "Then, attempting to pass off the costs of her mistake to Oregon taxpayers — that's atrocious."

Jennifer Sitton, a campaign spokesperson for Johnson, questioned why news organizations would report on the incident. "This is literal ambulance chasing media doing the bidding of the party opposition researchers who are afraid of our campaign," she said in an email.

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