

Knight's million is opening gambit in the high stakes governor's race

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — On April Fool's Day, Nike founder Phil Knight gave \$750,000 to a 2022 campaign for governor, but this time the joke is on Republicans and Democrats.

Knight's contributions to the insurgent campaign of former Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose now total \$1 million, seven months before the Nov. 7 general election.

It's a clear sign that Knight sees Johnson's unaffiliated campaign as the best shot at ending Democrats' 35-year hold on Oregon's governorship.

It's a switch from 2018, when Knight gave early and often — and very big — to former Rep. Knute Buehler, R-Bend, who lost the general election to incumbent Kate Brown. His \$2.5 million in contributions primed the GOP pump to compete with Democrats in a race that cost nearly \$40 million for Brown to win.

The Knight money will require responses from contributors to Democrats and Republicans, especially after the May 17 primary.

Spending could set record

Thomas Wheatley, a consultant for the governor's campaign of former House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said Democrats are taking notice of the rising level of spending in the state and will stay competitive.

"Democrats in Oregon and the national party under-

MORE INFORMATION

Other GOP candidates for governor candidates with more than \$10,000 in funds:

- Bend social media and marketing consultant Brandon Merritt has \$33,367 in the bank.
- Redmond businessman Bill Sizemore has \$12,860 in the bank.
- Baker City Mayor Kerry McQuisten: \$34,117 in the bank. McQuisten has raised and spent more than \$100,000.
- Tigard businessman Nicholas Hess has raised and spent more than \$100,000 but has a negative account balance.
- Former school superintendent Marc Thielman, who lives in Cottage Grove, has raised and spent more than \$140,000 and has \$23,070.

stand the importance of winning the state," Wheatley said. "Democrats have a strong history of doing what it takes."

Republican consultant and former state lawmaker Bill Post said Johnson is benefiting for the moment from a lack of opponents — the winners of the primary will define the race.

"There is no Republican nominee yet or any media attention yet on Betsy Johnson's extensive record of voting with Tina Kotek," Post said. "Betsy was a Democrat three years ago when she voted yes on the Corporate Activity Tax." Post said despite a long drought in races for Oregon governor, he believes national Republicans know there is opportunity in Oregon this year. Democratic resources are spread thin trying to defend dozens of political hot spots.

"When it comes to the general election, with a

strong Republican candidate who stands up for our values, the funding will turn to that candidate," Post said.

For now, the fundraising gap looks large. Johnson has more than \$5.1 million in the bank.

Only two candidates among the 34 in the May primary have more than \$1 million in the bank from wide-spread fundraising as of April 5: Kotek has \$1.15 million, while former House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, has \$1.18 million.

Lake Oswego consultant and attorney Bob Tiernan, a Republican, has \$1,126,795, which includes \$500,000 contributions each from himself and Grants Pass LLC, with which he is affiliated.

Treasurer Tobias Read has raised more than \$1.3 million in the past two years and has \$888,895 on hand.

Johnson will need the

money since she won't have the massive pockets of the two national and state parties to depend on. She needs to run a signature campaign to qualify to submit just under 25,000 valid signatures to the secretary of state by the end of August to secure a spot on the general election ballot.

A likely three-way race between the Democratic and Republican primary winners, along with Johnson, could eclipse the 2018 spending record.

'Red Tide' swelling

In 2022, the winners of the Democratic and Republican primary will get an infusion of national campaign cash, especially Democrats looking to push their winning streak for governor to almost four decades.

But times have changed since four years ago. The Democratic "Blue Wave" has switched to a Republican "Red Tide."

This election, Democrats are on the defense. Along with any current political issues, the Democrats are fighting the course of political history.

The party of new presidents usually loses seats in Congress in the first midterm election, an average of about 25 seats.

Democrats are hanging on to majorities in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House by their fingernails. The House majority is down to 221-209 with five vacancies, well within the average midterm margin of loss to give the chamber back to Republicans.

Oregon has distributed only half of emergency rental help so far

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Housing and Community Services Department said that as of Wednesday, April 6, it has made \$319.3 million in emergency rental assistance payments to landlords on behalf of 48,313 Oregon households since the U.S. Treasury made the first federal funds available in May 2021.

But it has received a total of 105,082 applications. Because of duplicate applications, the actual number of households applying is closer to 100,000, state officials say. A household can get assistance only once.

State law shields tenants from eviction proceedings while their applications for assistance are pending, if they show proof to their landlords. The shield ends when the application is approved or denied. The law also set Feb. 28 as the deadline for payment of past-due rent, going back to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic on April 1, 2020.

March 21 was the deadline, and it resulted in a final statewide surge of 13,592 applications for the month. The program paused applications on Dec. 1, reopened on Jan. 26, and was scheduled to close March 14. But Oregon got a last-minute allocation of \$16 million in federal funds that went unspent in other states and communities.

State officials still hope for a greater share of the

additional \$198 million they requested from the Treasury.

Five counties and the city of Portland got federal funds separately for their own rental assistance programs, and their totals are not reflected in the state agency figures.

The Oregon Legislature approved \$200 million from the state budget for emergency rental assistance in a special session in December 2020, when prospects for federal aid appeared uncertain. That \$200 million was spent by the close of the two-year state budget cycle in June 2021.

Oregon got an initial \$289 million for emergency rental assistance from the U.S. Treasury, which allocated money that Congress approved as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, President Joe Biden's pandemic recovery plan. That \$289 million has been spent or committed.

The program has continued with \$100 million more that the Legislature approved from the current state budget in December, plus \$16 million more from the Treasury, and \$13 million that the state housing agency shifted from housing stabilization programs. Oregon also got \$1.1 million from the Treasury late last year.

Tenants can call Oregon Law Center's Eviction Defense Project at 888-585-9638 or evictiondefense@oregonlawcenter.org.

Fire-detecting cameras to be installed across state

By ALEX BAUMHARDT
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — Oregon soon will have nearly 60 cameras across the state perched on cellphone towers, old fire towers and mountaintops, watching for potential forest fires across the state.

The cameras, part of the ALERTWildfire network, help fire departments and state agencies spot wildfires early, predict their movements and slow their spread. They also allow Oregonians the opportunity to make evacuation decisions early, based on their proximity to fires.

The network is made up of two dozen cameras now, which will more than double with new state money.

Legislators in February appropriated \$4.5 million to the Oregon Hazards Lab at the University of Oregon to add at least 29 cameras across the state over the next year. Most of the two dozen currently operating are in Southeast and Western Oregon. New cameras will be concentrated in the Rogue Valley and in the Bend, Richmond and La Pine areas.

The video streams are accessible online 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to the public and to emergency response agencies and firefighters, who can also use a time lapse feature to go back and trace the origins of a fire. Additionally, artificial intelligence software in the system can detect smoke and alert fire agencies and emergency responders.

Such a forest surveillance system was first implemented around Lake Tahoe in 2014



ALERTWildfire.org/Contributed Photo

This view came from a camera on Pine Mountain east of Bend that's part of the ALERTWildfire network. The cameras help firefighters and the public spot wildfires.

by the University of Nevada Reno and has expanded to Oregon, California, Washington and Idaho in partnership with state and federal agencies and public universities.

The Oregon expansion is being spearheaded by Doug Toomey, a geophysicist and director of the Oregon Hazards Lab, where scientists study natural disasters in the Pacific Northwest, and search for ways to use technology to monitor and mitigate them.

Toomey hopes the camera's will be useful to people living in areas prone to wildfire.

"You don't have to sit and

wait to see if your home is being evacuated. You can see what things look like in real time," he said.

In California, the system has allowed fire agencies to respond more strategically to fires when they begin to move. During the Lilac Fire in San Diego County in 2017, several fire departments collaborated to double the size of their initial response within the first 10 minutes of flames spreading. They could see the size of the fire from the elevated cameras rather than waiting to assess on the ground, according to a CBS news report.

Toomey said the Hazards Lab can program cameras to gray out homes or businesses upon request for privacy reasons. Toomey said for the most part, people living within view of the fire cameras have seen the benefits outweigh their concerns.

The number of cameras in Oregon are still small in comparison to other states that are part of the ALERTWildfire collaborative. In California, the network has more than 1,000 cameras positioned around the state including dozens near its border with Oregon.

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT:

www.EastOregonian.com

pendleton Friends of the Library
BOOK SALE
April 15th & 16th • 10am-5pm
Pendleton Public Library
502 SW Dorion Ave
FREE ADMISSION

Hand Crafted Loans for Eastern Oregon Homes
Umpqua offers a full range of home loan programs, whether you are buying, refinancing, building or renovating.

UMPQUA BANK Home Lending

Lee Ann Ottosen
HL Loan Officer
NHLS 277636
T (541) 324-6112
C (541) 969-8020
LeeAnnOttosen@UmpquaBank.com
UmpquaBank.com/Lee-Ann-Ottosen

Member FDIC Equal Housing Lender SBA Preferred Lender NHLS 4019E

2022
I ♥ Northeast Oregon
PHOTO CONTEST
Visit eastoregonian.com and enter today!

A Tradition of Quality
SINCE 1997

OLD HICKORY
— BUILDINGS & SHEDS —

SHEDS FOR ALL YOUR NEEDS!
Free delivery and set up within 30 miles
Tobias Unruh, owner
600 David Eccles Rd
Baker City, Oregon

ELKHORN BARN CO.
Custom Barns and Storage

Sales 541-519-2968 • Elkhornbarns@gmail.com • 509-331-4558