

Candidates face off in Bend governor's debate

BY GARY A. WARNER
AND ANNA KAMINSKI

Oregon Capital Bureau

The three top candidates for governor engaged in a sharp, rapid-fire debate in Bend on Tuesday, Sept. 27, dipping into their campaign talking points during 90 minutes of rehashing old feuds while promising new beginnings.

Unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson, Democrat Tina Kotek and Republican Christine Drazen offered different recollections of their shared time together in the Oregon Legislature.

Kotek was House Speaker before resigning to run for governor. Drazen was the leader of the minority-party Republicans in the House before also stepping down to run. Johnson was a Democratic state senator until resigning from both the Senate and the Democratic Party in a bid to be just the second person to win the governorship without major party support.

Seated in soft wing-armed orange chairs on the stage at Tykeson Hall on the Oregon State University-Cascades campus, each candidate said she would be the best agent for change for the state after nearly eight years with Kate Brown as governor.

"We're better at pitching tents than we are pulling permits," Johnson said, linking homeless camps and the lack of new housing. Kotek would be "more Kate Brown than Kate Brown," while Drazen would be tied to a GOP that has moved to the right, Johnson believes.

"The Democrats have an agenda; the Republicans have an agenda," Johnson said, while she would have "an agenda unfettered by an ideology."

Kotek said she was inspired by young volunteers on her campaign looking for the next governor to be an agent for change.

"Take action," she said. Johnson and Drazen were



Oregon governor candidates, seated from left, Betsy Johnson, Tina Kotek and Christine Drazen prepare for a debate at OSU-Cascades Tuesday, Sept. 27, 2022, in Bend.

similar in emphasizing what they would not do, Kotek asserted. Despite Johnson's former party status, Kotek said her views were closer to Drazen in opposing a cap on carbon emissions and favoring business interests over organized labor and workers.

Drazen said Johnson's two decades as a Democratic legislator outweighed her decision last year to leave the party and the state Senate, while Kotek would be a continuation of 40 years of Democrats holding the governorship.

"This is the definition of Tina Kotek's approach to the governor's office — don't change course, don't change direction, keep doing more of the same," Drazen said.

Drazen echoed a question asked by Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in his successful 1980 race against President Jimmy Carter.

"Is your family better off than four years ago?" Drazen asked viewers.

The debate was sponsored by OSU-Cascades, the City Club of Central Oregon, and Bend television station KTVZ. Cathy Marshall, a KTVZ anchor, moderated the debate, which was broadcast live in the Bend area and was avail-

able elsewhere only on KTVZ's website. The internet version of the forum was cut off at 7:30, with only the broadcast and cable audience seeing the final 10 minutes, including the candidates' summations.

A passionate but well-behaved crowd of around 70 people gathered outside of Tykeson Hall ahead of the debate, waving American flags and toting signs supporting their candidates. Repeating chants from the crowd for "Tina" or for "Drazen" fought for dominance while officers from the Oregon State Police roamed the perimeter to assist OSU-Cascades' small security staff as a safety precaution. The Johnson camp was quiet and small in number, despite her historic roots in Central Oregon.

At one point, song broke out among Drazen supporters, and others joined in singing "America the Beautiful" and "The Star Spangled Banner."

Many in the crowd weren't allowed to attend the debate, which was invitation-only, let alone see the candidates. Attendance was reserved for some community leaders, some OSU-Cascades students and 10 invitees from each of the campaigns.

Deschutes County Commissioner Tony DeBono and Bend City Councilor Melanie Kebler made brief appearances outside the debate hall, mingling with Drazen and Kotek supporters respectively before the debate began.

Katy Brooks, CEO of the Bend Chamber, was in the audience at the debate, and she



Supporters of Oregon governor candidates rally prior to a debate at OSU-Cascades Tuesday, Sept. 27, 2022, in Bend.

submitted a question for the candidates asking about their strategies to remedy the housing crisis in Central Oregon.

The barbs, accusations and differing versions of recent legislative history during the debate alluded to insider feuds that have made Kotek and Drazen personal antagonists. Johnson has gone her own way on Kotek-backed legislative initiatives on pollution, guns and worker rights.

The race between the three has been rated as a "toss-up" by two national forecasters — The Cook Political Report and the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia. The race has attracted over \$30 million in campaign contributions to the three, with national party groups backing Kotek and Drazen, while Johnson's successful petition drive to qualify for the ballot was bolstered by cash from Nike founder Phil Knight and several timber and construction companies and groups.

The debate began with a

question asking if the candidates would support Measure 114 on the November ballot. The measure would increase requirements for gun ownership and improve law enforcement databases.

Johnson said the change in law would be a burden to small law-enforcement agencies. She said she could support legislation to raise the minimum purchasing age for some firearms from 18 to 21.

Drazen said "more gun laws will not prevent every single tragedy from happening."

Kotek and Johnson both said they supported abortion rights, while Drazen said she was personally anti-abortion but would uphold Oregon's law, among the least restrictive in the nation.

Drazen complained about taxes that have been imposed in recent years in Oregon and said, "We've got to be serious about holding the line on new taxes." Johnson also criticized the state's regulators as "punitive and predatory."

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Discovery Kids Worship 6:30 PM
3520 Birch St, Baker City
541-523-4332

Harvest Church

WORSHIP GATHERING
10:00 AM

Harvest Cafe Open
9:00 AM - 9:50 AM

3720 Birch St, Baker City
541-523-4233
www.BakerCityHarvest.org

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Baker City
541-523-6586

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Live Streaming on Facebook

1734 Third Street, Baker City
541-523-3922
firstlutheranbakercity@gmail.com

Baker & Haines United Methodist Churches

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Haines UMC, 814 Robert St, at 9am

To join us on Zoom email
bakermc@thegeo.net
and the link will be emailed to you or follow us on Facebook

Pastor Michele Holloway

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www.ChristianScience.com

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Day Chapel in Cathedral
Wed Daily Mass 9 AM
at St. Alphonsus Chapel
Sat 8 AM at Day Chapel

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Baker City Sunday Mass 9:30 am
St. Therese in Halfway 2 pm Sat
St. Anthony's in North Powder
11:30 Sun
541-523-4521
Corner of First & Church, Baker City

St. Stephen's Episcopal

Services at 9 AM
1st & 3rd Sundays, Holy Eucharist
2nd & 4th Sundays, Morning Prayer
5th Sunday, Morning Prayer

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Corner Church & First Streets
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2nd Service & Sunday School 10:00 AM

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Youth Pastor Silas Moe
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firstpresbaker.blogspot.com

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541-523-2397

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Sunday School 8:30am

Coffee served 9:15 AM - 9:45 AM

Pastor Troy Teeter
1250 Hughes Lane, Baker City
(Corner of Cedar & Hughes)
541-523-3533
www.bakernaz.com

Calvary Baptist Church

Third & Broadway
541-523-3891

Sundays
9 AM Sunday School
10 AM Worship Service
Mondays
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Baker Teens Underground
Wednesdays
5:30-6:30 PM Dinner & Prayer Time
Thursdays
5 - 6 PM Free Community Recovery
6 - 7 PM Celebrate Recovery
bakercalvarybaptist.com

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