

Drazan: Opportunity for GOP

Candidate touts party's chances in governor's race in John Day visit

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Former state House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, one of 15 candidates vying for the Republican nomination for governor in this year's election, made a campaign stop Saturday, Jan. 8, at the Squeeze-In Restaurant and Deck in John Day.



Christine Drazan

The two-term state representative from Canby was joined by Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, who has thrown his support behind her campaign.

Drazan said voters have a real opportunity to elect a Republican governor in Oregon, given the historical trend of the sitting president's party performing poorly in midterm elections. Add to that Democratic Gov. Kate Brown's lack of popularity as well as President Joe Biden's, she said — which prompted an audience member to show off his "Let's go Brandon" T-shirt — and the conditions are even more favorable.

During her stump speech, Drazan talked about her time

as minority leader and how she led her caucus on a trip out of state to deny House Democrats the quorum they needed to pass legislation aimed at reducing carbon emissions.

A Republican governor with veto power would bring the Democrats to the table for negotiation, according to Drazan.

Currently, with a Democratic majority in the House and Senate and a Democratic governor, there is no incentive to negotiate, she added, saying that's bad for Oregonians.

"If you don't involve the people who are impacted, you're not going to get it right," Drazan said. "You're going to get it wrong. And it's going to harm communities. It's going to harm families, it's going to harm our kids and our future."

Grant County Republican Chair Frances Preston asked Drazan about her role in the passage of Senate Bill 554, which broadened a ban on guns in public buildings and opened the door for additional restrictions.

The measure did away with a longstanding provision that allowed people with concealed handgun licenses to carry guns in public buildings, school districts and universities the option to enact tighter regulations if they so choose.

Gun rights supporters heavily criticized lawmakers for not fleeing the Capitol to block the bill. One detractor launched a failed recall attempt against state Sen. Lynn Findley for not



walking out to deny the Democrats a quorum.

Drazan said every Republican in the Legislature voted no on the bill and that its passage was not the outcome they wanted.

"But that's the hard thing about being in the supermajority," she said. "We need to elect more Republicans."

Preston asked how, as governor, Drazan would address the impacts of the regulations.

Drazan said that she would veto any bills that infringed on Second Amendment rights if elected governor. However, the courts overturn SB554, it would remain the law.

"The governor has got to live within the scope of the governor's authority," Drazan said. "And if there's a gun bill that comes my way, I'll veto that."

Sena Raschio, a kindergarten teacher at Humboldt Elementary, asked what Drazan would do to help with rural public school infrastructure.

Drazan cited Measure 50, a property tax limitation initiative from the 1990s. Essentially, the measure shifted the responsibility to fund schools to the state and local taxpayers. The state provides basic support proportional to the number of students in each district. For additional funding, districts

can also ask voters to approve local option levies. What that created, she said, was a system of "haves and have-nots," where one community might be able to actually afford to fix crumbling schools, while others may not.

Drazan said she wants to get a sense of the needs at the statewide level and see what the best support for rural schools would be.

In one of the campaign stop's final questions, Preston asked Drazan if she could confirm whether she led the effort to oust a Republican state lawmaker from the House.

Mike Nearman, a former state representative from Independence, who unanimously voted to expel the House, ultimately pleaded guilty to illegally allowing armed protesters into the state Capitol during a special session in December 2020 when the building was closed to the public due to COVID-19.

Drazan said the Republicans all agreed that the building should have been open, but Nearman coordinated with the protesters without the knowledge of anyone else in the caucus. Not until a video of Nearman planning the event surfaced did she find out that he lied to her, Drazan said.

"Mike's decision to let people into the building actually harmed police officers. Mike's decision for how he did what he did was the problem. It's not his intent. It was how that intent played out," she said.

Gomez courts Grant County voters

By BENNETT HALL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Gubernatorial hopeful Jessica Gomez held a lively conversation with a dozen Grant County residents last weekend during a campaign stop at a John Day restaurant.



Jessica Gomez

Gomez is one of 15 people who have thrown their hats in the ring for the Republican nomination in the race to succeed term-limited Democrat Kate Brown as Oregon's next governor.

The Medford resident, founder and CEO of Rogue Valley Microdevices, spent 90 minutes on the morning of Sunday, Jan. 9, discussing campaign issues at the Squeeze-In Restaurant and Deck.

The conversation covered a wide range of topics, including:

- Education: Gomez, who has served on several education and workforce development boards, favors an approach that encourages high school students to explore potential career pathways.

"We are in a global competition for technological development and a lot of other things, and our kids have to be able to compete," she said.

- Violent elements in Portland protests: "We need to put a stop to it," she said, adding that people who commit property crimes and other offenses need to be prosecuted. "We have to support our men and women in blue."

- Grant funding: "I think we are wasting a lot of money in the way that money flows down from the federal government to the state government and on to local government," she said, citing high administrative costs and excessive restrictions on how the money can be spent.

"I'm a big believer in flexible dollars."

- Forest management:



Gomez said Oregon needs to take a leadership role on this issue. She advocates partnering with other Western states to pressure the federal government to streamline the process of thinning and logging to reduce fuel loads on fire-prone public lands.

"If you care at all about carbon emissions, you can't allow a million acres to go up in flames," she said.

"We have the knowledge and the expertise to do this properly," she added. "And there's this misperception among environmentalists and others that rural Oregon doesn't care about the environment, and it's just not true."

- Immigration: Gomez said American companies need access to workers with certain skill sets and that barriers to legal immigration are driving some people to enter the country illegally.

"We have to have a secure border," she said, "but we also have to have an immigration system that's functional."

- Top priorities: If elected, Gomez said, her first order of business would be to streamline state agencies and make sure they are delivering value to Oregonians. "You have to give them goals and you have to hold them accountable," she said.

The second would be to work with the mayor of Portland to address the city's homeless crisis and crime problem. "We have to get downtown Portland cleaned up," she said.

Meeting set Wednesday to discuss Pit Stop plans

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Downtown business owners and John Day officials will meet at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 12, at the John Day Fire Hall to discuss how the city should use \$1 million in state funding for infrastructure improvements related to a new Kam Wah Chung interpretive center.

One bone of contention is what should be done with the city-owned land at Main and Canton, dubbed the "Pit Stop." Public restrooms have been built on the site, but otherwise it remains undeveloped.

While some see the property as a space for food carts, bike lockers, and possibly a farmers market to promote tourism, others oppose the food cart idea and want to see the site used as parking for oversized vehicles.

Sherrie Rinniger, owner of Etc. on Main Street and president of the Grant County Chamber of Commerce, said businesses originally asked for a parking lot for big trucks and motor homes.

Rinniger said she was not against the restrooms but said the city should have built them with enough room to accommodate large vehicles.

Rinniger said she did not believe the city needed food carts and that they were not part of the original plan.

Shawn Duncan, owner of the Squeeze-In Restaurant and Deck across the street from the Pit Stop, said restaurants have struggled throughout the pandemic and don't need added competition from food carts.

Duncan said there is limited parking in downtown John Day, especially near her restaurant.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said the city had not made any decisions beyond building the restrooms.

"Council reviewed and commented on preliminary plans," he said, "but there was never a motion or a consensus on the final design beyond agreeing to seek more feedback."

Bryan Hubbard, owner of the Grub Steak and Ugly Truth bars downtown, said he had purchased a food cart and reached out to Green roughly a month ago about parking his food cart at the Pit Stop.

Hubbard said he wants every business to succeed but doesn't believe the Pit Stop can accommodate oversized vehicles. Besides, he added, downtown merchants cannot expect people not to park in front of their businesses, which are located on public streets.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 12

Bud Pierce
• 11 a.m.-1 p.m., main conference room, Grant County Regional Airport, 7200 Airport Road, John Day

Dr. Bud Pierce, a candidate for the Republican nomination for governor, will meet with area residents to discuss their ideas for Oregon's future. Pierce, a Salem physician, was the GOP nominee for governor in 2016. Anyone interested in attending is asked to RSVP via email to info@budpierce.org.

FRIDAY, JAN. 21

Ellis Tracey American Legion Auxiliary
• 2 p.m., Grant County Chamber of Commerce, 301 W. Main St., John Day

The group will hold an in-person meeting. For more information, call 541-575-0076.

Do you have a community event in Grant County you'd like to publicize? Email information to editor@bmeagle.com. The deadline is noon Friday for publication the following Wednesday.



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THE JUNIPER ARTS COUNCIL / GRANT COUNTY CULTURAL COALITION IS SEEKING GRANT PROPOSALS FOR OREGON CULTURAL TRUST GRANT AWARDS

The coalition has \$12,000 from the Oregon Cultural Trust to distribute in Grant County to organizations for projects relating to culture and / or heritage.

Applications are available from Karin Barntish, 131 W. Main Street, John Day, Oregon, or call Kris Beal at (541)932-4892 for more information or an application.

Applications are due by 5:00pm on Wednesday, February 2, 2022.

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