

# Gov hopefuls debate the issues

By COREY BUCHANAN  
Oregon Capital Bureau

WELCHES — During the first general election debate in a race for who will become the next governor of Oregon, the three candidates empathized with many Oregonians dissatisfied with where the state is headed. Each of the three women, however, offered differing solutions to the state's myriad issues in a 90-minute forum that underscored the chasms among their political philosophies and leadership styles.

Republican nominee Christine Drazan, Democratic nominee Tina Kotek and independent Betsy Johnson — who are running neck-and-neck in recent polls — shared the stage in an event hosted by Pamplin Media Group and sponsored by the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association at the Mt. Hood Oregon Resort in Welches Friday, July 29. The debate was moderated by PMG President Mark Garber and included questions from local journalists, as well as the opportunity for the candidates to confront each other with their own inquiries.

Drazan, a Canby resident and former Oregon House of Representatives minority leader who won the Republican nomination, made clear that she views her opponents as leaders of an establishment that has brought Oregon to where it is today, and that the state needs new solutions to chronic problems such as homelessness,

a lack of housing and mental health services, and economic insecurity.

"It's a little bit ironic to me to constantly hear my opponents on the stage be (aghast) on how horrible Oregon is on this and that and the other — 'We're 50th (in the country) on this and we have to work on that,'" Drazan said. "They've been in charge. We got here because of their voices. There are not two other people in the state with more power than them besides the governor herself and maybe the Senate president."

Johnson, a Scappoose resident who was a Democratic state senator before resigning to run as an unaffiliated candidate, emphasized that she represents a middle ground between what she described as extremes on her political right and left, noting Drazan's pro-life stance on abortion and positing that Kotek is a part of a progressive left that is responsible for mounting problems.

"Oregonians are distrustful of the radical right and they are terrified of the progressive left. ... What could be more different and impactful than a governor with an allegiance only to Oregonians and not to a party agenda or special interests?" she said.

Kotek, a Portlander who was the speaker of the House for nine years prior to winning the Democratic nomination, framed herself as a candidate who seeks solutions rather than simply rejecting the status quo.



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Candidates for governor: Republican Christine Drazan, left, Democrat Tina Kotek and non-affiliated Betsy Johnson.

"No matter what the other candidates say today, there are no quick fixes. There are no miracle cures to take on these large challenges. Only hard work is going to allow us to ensure that every part of our state can thrive," she said.

On the issues, Drazan clarified that she considers Joe Biden to be the fairly elected president of the United States — despite efforts from members of her party to sow distrust in the 2020 election results — while also stating that she would maintain the current gun and abortion laws in place in Oregon and expressing opposition to Gov. Kate Brown's executive order directing state agencies to reduce carbon emissions. Regarding her and her colleagues' decision in 2020 to walk out of the Capitol to combat Democrats' cap-and-trade proposal while she was the House minority leader, she said she may have supported

some form of policy incentivizing businesses to reduce emissions — but not in the form proposed by Democrats.

"The need to lead a Republican effort to deny quorum on this was simply because of the intensity of single-party majority control," she said.

Drazan also said she felt the state was focusing too much on housing to address the homelessness crisis, and not enough on other issues like treating addiction and mental health.

Kotek described the walk-out as a decision to throw in the towel on the issue of addressing climate change and expressed support for the governor's executive order.

Further, she was the only candidate to firmly say she would direct public resources to helping people living in states where abortion is illegal to access that service here. Johnson also emphasized her staunch pro-choice stance on

abortion, but felt organizations like Planned Parenthood could support people arriving from other states without governmental funding.

"We are in too big of a moment in our country to say no to women who need access to care," Kotek said. "And I'm the only person in this race who has believed in access to health care — and that is what abortion is — and that's why I'm backed by Planned Parenthood and Pro Choice Oregon."

Drazan, meanwhile, said she is pro-life but that her responsibility as governor would be to uphold the laws in place.

Unlike Drazan and Johnson, Kotek said she supports IP17 — a ballot measure that would require background checks for purchasing firearms and prohibit the sale of large-capacity magazines (except for military and law enforcement) — and established herself as the candidate in support of gun control measures. She clarified that she's not interested in "taking people's guns away," however, after a quip from Johnson suggesting that intention.

Johnson, meanwhile, castigated Gov. Kate Brown and state leadership for Intel's decision to build a new chip manufacturing facility in Ohio rather than Oregon, saying that she had talked with Intel executives who said state leadership was not receptive to their needs and that she would make sure she consulted regularly with

major industry players. Further, Johnson addressed her decision to vote for the corporate activity tax to add school funding even though she now is against it, saying that she felt schools needed more money at the time but now believes the tax is too big of a burden on businesses and should be altered. Similar to Drazan, Johnson felt that Kotek's leadership has led to there being "tent cities all over Portland."

"This is a humanitarian crisis, and we must never lose sight of the fact that it's inexorably tied to drugs and mental illness in our streets," Johnson said.

In closing remarks, Drazan commented on what she felt was a divisive attitude exuded by Johnson, saying she was tired of being yelled at and adding that she felt Johnson left the Democratic Party when it was politically convenient to do so.

Johnson said choosing Drazan would be moving from one extreme to the other and told voters she does not care whether you voted for Biden or Donald Trump.

"I want to recapture the maverick spirit and get us back on track," Johnson said.

Kotek, in her final remarks, talked about how she fell in love with Oregon when she moved here 35 years ago and that she views it as a state of possibility toward what it could become.

"I am sure I know how to work with people and solve problems because I have a track record to show that," she added.

# Baker GOP votes to suspend board

Grant party chair to lead review committee

BY CLAYTON FRANKE  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The Baker County Republican Party voted to suspend its own executive committee for 60 days and launch an investigation into the county chair, Suzan Ellis Jones, at a meeting on Thursday evening, July 28, at the Baker County Library.

The central committee also appointed a temporary executive committee to serve during the suspension period and moved to hold a recall meeting for the entire executive committee.

The action comes on the grounds of what some county party members said was a pattern of failed leadership by the executive committee.

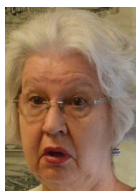
Dan Johnson, a registered Baker County Republican and precinct committee person (PCP) for the county, organized the meeting along with other central committee members. Johnson was nominated and confirmed to serve as the temporary chair during the suspension, effective immediately.

"Many citizens of Baker County are simply tired of the discourse within the local GOP organization," Johnson wrote in a July 27 letter to Jones. "It must stop, and the only logical approach to solve such disagreements is for a cooling off period and an unbiased, independent review of the disputed issues."

The party voted to establish a committee of "three neutral and detached county chairs or vice chairs" from outside the county under the leadership of Grant County Republican Party Chair Frances Preston.

This committee will investigate a Feb. 9 letter that former Oregon GOP Chair Dallas Heard wrote to Jones detailing the complaints that Baker County precinct committee persons had made concerning Jones.

According to the letter, Baker County PCPs have complained that Jones had a conflict of interest involving her daughter, Kerry McQuisten (the Baker City mayor, who also attended the meeting), and that Jones didn't properly inform the party about meetings.



Preston

The public meeting came after two incidents involving the GOP that occurred earlier this year.

On March 25, police responded to a complaint about audience behavior during a private GOP meeting at the Baker Elks Lodge, when Rick Rienks, a PCP who also attended the July 28 meeting, was escorted from the building.

A little over two months later, a Baker City couple received a letter they called "harassing" from county party officials, accusing them of disrupting a private meeting of the executive committee on June 7.

And for roughly the first hour of Thursday night's three-hour affair, there was some question as to whether or not party members would even be allowed to vote on the scheduled agenda.

Jones, acting as chair, called the meeting to order at 6:30 and immediately appointed Vance Day, a former Marion County judge, as the temporary chair for that meeting.

After a few minutes of disagreement between Day and Johnson as to who would run the meeting, Kenny Hackett, a central committee member, motioned to vote on the meeting's proposed agenda. Day then informed the meeting that they had to verify a quorum was present before any official business was conducted, per the Baker County Republican committee bylaws.

The bylaws state that a quorum of three executive officers must be present at a meeting to conduct any official business.

Day identified Jones and Tom Van Diepen as the only



Clayton Franke/Baker City Herald

Vance Day (left), former Marion County judge, stands in front of the Baker County Republican central committee while Kenny Hackett looks on at a meeting at the Baker County Library on Thursday, July 28, 2022.

two executive members — out of six total — present at the meeting and said, because of the lack of a quorum, that the meeting could proceed only as an informal discussion and not official business.

At the time, Jones said she didn't know where the other four executive members were.

Several party members said the absence of the executive committee was a deliberate attempt to prevent the central committee from voting on the scheduled agenda, which involved suspending the executives.

Jake Brown, another PCP at the meeting, said that in eight years of attending county Republican meetings, he couldn't think of another time when a quorum wasn't present.

"I don't think people came here to be played by the executive committee," Brown said.

The four missing executives were Vice Chair Julie McKinney, Treasurer Joanna Dixon (who is also the treasurer for McQuisten's campaign committee and, along with McQuisten, on the Baker City Council), Keith Jones, who is married to Suzan Ellis Jones, and Secre-

tary Justin Langan.

Jones did not respond by press time to several attempts by the Herald to reach her via phone.

Several meeting attendees suggested that another executive could be reached electronically and that Jones should attempt to contact them, but she never did.

The committee had still not addressed any official business by 7:30, an hour after the meeting's start.

Doni Bruland, a PCP who was nominated and confirmed as vice chair for the duration of the suspension, then questioned Day's right to lead the meeting.

In 2018, the Oregon Supreme Court suspended Day, then a Marion County judge, for three years, citing ethics violations. At the time he was also under investigation for gun law violations, which were later dismissed.

After serving the suspension, he lost a bid for Oregon State Court of Appeals earlier this year.

Day did not respond by press time after multiple phone calls from the Herald on Friday morning.

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