

Candidates pass on E. Oregon event

By ANDREW CUTLER, DAKOTA CASTETS-DIDIER and PHIL WRIGHT
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Democrat Tina Kotek, left, Republican Christine Drazan, center, and unaffiliated Betsy Johnson, the leading candidates for Oregon governor, are not coming to Eastern Oregon for a public debate in front of local voters.

Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

LA GRANDE — An effort to host a gubernatorial candidate forum at Eastern Oregon University for rural residents appears to have fizzled out, according to the organization behind the effort.

Jennifer Groth, director of policy and partnerships for Rural Development Initiatives, said in an email that the lack of a television sponsor for an event on the La Grande campus was ultimately what torpedoed the effort.

“Our initial hope with this proposal was to ensure that the gubernatorial candidates could hear directly from rural voters and that rural voters could hear directly from the candidates,” she said. “And so we thought this would be an opportunity to do that. I’m assuming there are other ways to connect those folks to one another, but that was our hope. And so, of course, we’re disappointed that it didn’t come to pass.”

The effort, Groth said, began following the primary when the field was set with Republican candidate Christine Drazan, Democratic candidate Tina Kotek and unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson. Groth said Rural Development Initiatives proposed to all three campaigns a series of virtual town hall meetings to represent different regions around the state, culminating in an in-person event on the campus of Eastern Oregon University.

“We talked to the different campaigns, and Tina Kotek’s campaign came back and said we could propose to do three virtual town halls, one for each candidate, and then participate in the culminating event at Eastern Oregon University,” she said.

There was initial interest from Drazan’s campaign, Groth said.

“They basically told me, ‘Just let us know what’s happening, keep us in the loop, and we’ll let you know if we decide to participate.’ So I’ve been keeping them in the loop but I haven’t heard much from that campaign.”

Groth said Johnson’s campaign staff indicated pretty much throughout early conversations that their interest was focused on televised opportunities to hear from the candidates as opposed to other types of formats because they thought that would reach the broadest number of Oregonians.

“So we first tried to arrange for livestreaming, which we could do with the resources that we had,” she said. “We went back to the campaigns and said that this is the option we can pro-

vide as a livestreaming option for the event. But Betsy Johnson’s campaign was actually interested in the television sponsor.”

Groth said if candidates are truly interested in representing the entire state, then appearances in Eastern Oregon should be included.

“I’m concerned that hosting these events along the I-5 corridor or in more major metropolitan areas doesn’t get (rural) voices into the conversation, and so the issues that are of concern to those particular regions of the state don’t necessarily get addressed as part of the media coverage of the race,” she said.

Campaigns give their reasons

Jennifer Sitton, communications director for the Betsy Johnson for Governor campaign, said Johnson “welcomes every opportunity to debate her fellow candidates and wants to ensure that as many Oregonians as possible are able to hear directly from the candidates, which is why we are prioritizing televised debates.”

Sitton said the Johnson campaign had assumed broadcasting facilities in the Tri-Cities would be willing to host a gubernatorial debate, despite being north of Oregon’s border in Washington. Sitton explained the Johnson campaign was unclear on why that opportunity hasn’t arisen.

In July, all three candidates participated in an Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association debate that was livestreamed online rather than televised. Sitton explained that debate was a special circumstance as the ONPA is a “statewide newspaper association and the traditional first debate for gubernatorial candidates.”

Katie Wertheimer, communications director for Tina Kotek’s gubernatorial campaign, said Kotek hadn’t rejected the idea of an Eastern Oregon debate and had attended the Eastern Oregon Economic Summit in June, which featured all three candidates.

“We’re not aware of any debate

invitations from other Eastern Oregon media outlets,” Wertheimer explained.

“Back in June, Tina agreed to eight joint forums and debates across the state, and ultimately all three candidates agreed to five,” Wertheimer said, listing the Economic Summit in Hermiston, as well as other debates or forums in Welches, Bend, Medford and Portland.

John Burke, communications director for the Drazan campaign, said there was only one debate proposed in Eastern Oregon and the campaign “had some concerns with the format.” Burke did not comment on the nature of their concerns.

“Christine has spent more time in Eastern Oregon than any of the candidates running for governor,” he said, “and will continue to campaign hard to earn the votes of rural residents from now until Nov. 8.”

Northeastern Oregon party chairs react

Annette Lathrop, speaking as chair of the Wallowa County Republican Party, said she does not see much value to a debate in Eastern Oregon because her county is isolated and few would have access to it. A debate at EOU, she said, likely would profit La Grande and Pendleton more.

“There are debates, and for people tuned into that, they are available,” she said. “We can access those debates.”

She also said candidates are busy and only human, and there is only so much they can squeeze into a day of campaigning. She said the candidates don’t need to physically come to Eastern Oregon for voters to learn about them.

Union County Republican Party Chair Allen Duffy, however, said it’s a shame the gubernatorial candidates don’t hold a debate open to the public in Eastern Oregon.

“I understand that three counties in Oregon can decide who’s governor,” he said, “but that leaves the rest of us won-

dering who our candidates are.”

He said Drazan has visited Eastern Oregon several times, Kotek is firmly a leftest Democrat but Johnson presents some questions as a former Democrat now running without a party, and a public debate “would give people here an opportunity to see who she is.”

Rural voters get campaign ads, literature and propaganda, he said, but coming out to Eastern Oregon in person means voters here can see just where the candidates stand.

“If you really want to be true and honest to the voters, come out and have a debate,” Duffy said.

And a debate could fire up grassroots campaigning — knocking on doors, making phone calls, talking to people about candidates and issues.

“That’s what we do out here in Eastern Oregon,” he said. “Grassroots campaigning.”

Mark Peterson, co-chair of Umatilla County Democrats, said he has seen statewide candidates operate this way for years.

“People really feel like they are being ignored out here,” he said.

Statewide candidates tend to pay lip service to rural Oregon, Peterson said, and focus their campaigns on Oregon’s population centers from Portland south to Eugene. He said that could be why Johnson has some traction in Eastern Oregon.

She seems to be popular here and could be working on getting rural Oregonians to back her to make up for what she may not get in the metro areas.

But he said she has a lot of ground to cover there. Recent polling shows Kotek and Drazan each winning about 30% of the vote while Johnson trails at about 20%.

‘A long shot’

Tim Seydel, EOU’s vice president for university advancement, said the school explored a couple of options, including Oregon Public Broadcasting or using the school’s resources to livestream an event on the internet.

“That was kind of a long shot to see if OPB might be able to do it,” he said. “But based on the capacity to be able to do it again, it’s one of the challenges of being in a rural area.”

Seydel said the school continues to explore options, in case an 11th hour reprieve presents itself.

“It’s too bad we couldn’t come, we couldn’t get them to come to Eastern, to be here,” he said. “We were hoping to engage with students and area communities and other schools, but unfortunately it doesn’t look like we’ll get that shot this time around.”

Granite Hill Road gets an upgrade

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

GRANITE — The drive from Sumpter to Granite looks different than it did a few months ago.

Feels different, too. Smoother.

Two separate projects, one involving the highway and one in the forest that borders it, have transformed the trip.

The work is confined to the 9-mile stretch from Blue Springs Summit, west of Sumpter, to Granite.

Crews are repaving the two-lane highway, which is part of the Elkhorn Drive Scenic Byway and also known as the Granite Hill Road. Work started earlier this summer and is scheduled to be finished in November of this year, according to the Federal Highway Administration.

The cost is \$6,328,000.

The Grant County Road Department did some of the work, and the FHA awarded a contract to Marcum and Son LLC of Redmond.

Meanwhile, workers on both sides of the highway have been cutting trees and stacking the limbs into piles that will be burned, possibly starting in late 2023.

The thinning work is part of the Ten Cent project, which includes sections of the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla national forests, said Kendall Cikanek, ranger for the Wallowa-Whitman’s Whitman District.

The Ten Cent project dates to 2017. It includes 23,990 acres on the Umatilla National Forest, and 13,810 acres on the Wallowa-Whitman.

Its chief goal is to reduce the risk of wildfires spreading rapidly by creating fuel breaks, particularly along roads. These “defensible spaces” are areas where flames are less likely to climb into the crowns of trees, and where fire crews can concentrate their efforts to stop a blaze.

Cikanek said the strategy is similar to what the Forest Service has employed in the East Face project along the Elkhorn Mountains from near the Anthony Lakes Highway north to the La Grande area.

Church Directory

New Life Bible Church
2 Corinthians 5:17
Every Sunday in the L.C.
Community Center
(Corner of Second & Allen)
Contact Pastor Ed Stuttmann at 541-421-3888 • Begins at 4:00pm

Redeemer Lutheran Church
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627 SE Hillcrest, John Day
1st Sunday Worship/Communion10am
3rd Sunday Worship/Communion/Potluck.....4:30pm
2nd, 4th & 5th Sunday Worship.....10am
Sunday Bible Study8:45am
For information: 541-575-2348

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Three Angels Broadcasting Network
24/7 Inspirational Christian Broadcasting
Tune into **KSPJ 98.1 FM**
For more information, call 541 620-0340

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Grace Chapel (EMC)
154 E. Williams St.
Prairie City, Oregon
541 820-4437
Pastor Robert Perkins
Sunday School (all ages)
9:30-10:30
Sunday Worship
10:45-12:00

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
Sunday School9:30 am
Sunday Worship Service..... 10:45 am
Sunday Evening Service 6:00 pm
Children & Teen Activities
SMALL GROUPS CALL FOR MORE INFO
Weekdays: Sunshine Christian School
Pastor Randy Johnson
521 E. Main • John Day • 541-575-1895
www.johndaynazarene.com

Living Word Christian Center
59357 Hwy 26 Mt. Vernon
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Sundays 5:30pm
Youth: 0-6th Grade
Midweek Service
Thursdays 6:30pm
Youth: 0-6th Grade
Jr./Sr. High Youth Connection
Wednesdays at 6:30pm
Overcomer’s Outreach
Mondays at 6pm at LWCC
A Christ-Centered, 12-Step Recovery Support Group
Pastor Sharon Miller
541-932-4910
www.livingwordcc.com

John Day Valley Mennonite Church
Meeting every Sunday at Mt. Vernon Grange Hall
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship 10:50 a.m.
Pastor Leland Smucker
Everyone Welcome • 541-932-2861

JOHN DAY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Sunday Worship • 9AM
(541) 575-1326
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126 NW Canton, John Day
Food Pantry Friday 3-4PM
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Sunday Worship 11 am
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Sunday Evening Bible Talk..... 6 pm
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541-575-1202 Church
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Pastor Al Altnow