



Written by [James Murphy](#) on October 6, 2022

Will Oregon Elect Its First Republican Governor in Four Decades?

While this year's general election offers the Republican Party the opportunity to make significant gains in the United States Congress, possibly retaking the House of Representatives and maybe even the Senate, there are a few Democratic strongholds that no Republican could realistically hope to breach. Among such Democratic safe places would be the governor's office in the highly blue state of Oregon.

But now, less than a month from the election, Republican Christine Drahan holds a slim lead over Democrat Tina Kotek in several polls. Betsy Johnson, an independent candidate with a centrist message who formerly served as a Democrat in the Oregon State Senate, is the fly in the Democrat's ointment.



AP Images
Christine Drahan

The RealClearPolitics [average](#) shows Drahan up by 2.4 points over Kotek, with Johnson averaging 17-20 percent in key polls. Johnson has reportedly said that "having to choose between another left-wing liberal promising more of the same or a right-wing Trump apologist — is no choice at all."

Nike co-founder Phil Knight, a very prominent Oregonian, is [backing](#) Johnson's longshot run.

"There's a pretty darn good chance that Drahan could win," said Jim Moore, a Pacific University political science professor.

The last Republican to be elected governor of the Beaver State was Victor Atiyeh, who served from 1978 to 1986. Current governor Kate Brown, a Democrat, is ineligible to run again due to term limits in the state.

Drahan, the former House minority leader in the Statehouse, has earned a reputation as a hard-nosed politician who doesn't back down from a fight. She was a participant in the 2019 [denial of quorum](#) attack launched by Oregon Republicans to stall a costly and divisive climate bill.

Although the denial of quorum was eventually defeated and the climate bill passed, the incident showed that Drahan was a woman ready to fight for her ideals.

"[The Democrats] were going to run over anyone who stood in their way," said state Representative Shelly Boshart Davis, assistant leader of the House Republicans. "The person who stood in their way was a little redhead named Christine Drahan."

A relative newcomer to politics, the 50-year-old Drahan has proven that she has the will and the attitude to thwart the Democrats' plans.



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“She’s uniquely talented and incredibly ruthless,” said Greg Leo, a former chairman of the Oregon Republican Party. “She rose quickly and broke some china in the process.”

Drazan’s campaign is focused on issues that are simple to pin on Democratic incompetence — crime, homelessness, and especially the economy.

“Among those who say the economy is their top issue, 52% plan to vote for Drazan,” said pollster Spencer Kimball.

Drazan grew up poor in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Her mother suffered from multiple sclerosis and her father worked in lumber mills.

“She’s got an interesting log cabin story,” said Leo. “She came up from the trailers in Klamath Falls.”

Her opponent, Tina Kotek, is a lesbian proudly pushing the LGBTQ agenda, and says she “will be a leader who puts people first, who prioritizes justice and equity, who brings people together and inspires all of us to reach for a better future.”

Should Drazan win, the mother of three still faces many challenges. The current makeup of the Oregon Legislature has Democrats in charge of the House by a 37-23 margin, and in the Senate, Dems hold an 18-11 advantage.

Johnson would seem to be the key to victory for Drazan. Should the moderate former Democrat stay strong to the end and bring her supporters with her, then Oregon could elect its first Republican governor in four decades.

2022 offers a unique opportunity for Republicans in the state. Current Governor Kate Brown and U.S. President Joe Biden, also a Democrat, are both deeply unpopular. Independent candidate Johnson is saying things that a lot of disaffected Democrats are echoing, which may take votes from Kotek. If ever there was a chance to flip the Oregon governor’s house into the GOP’s hands, now’s the time.



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