

Longtime legislative staffer for Betsy Johnson repeatedly voiced hateful views online toward Black, Muslim and LGBTQ people

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Unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson speaks during a governor's debate hosted by Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association at Mt Hood Oregon Resort in Welches, Oregon. Photo by Jaime Valdez / Pamplin Media Group / poolJaime Valdez / Pamplin Media Group

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Original at

<https://www.oregonlive.com/politics/2022/08/longtime-legislative-staffer-for-betsy-johnson-repeatedly-voiced-hateful-views-online-toward-black-muslim-and-lgbtq-people.html>

For more than eight and a half years, Oregon unaffiliated gubernatorial candidate and former longtime lawmaker Betsy Johnson employed a woman as a legislative staffer who repeatedly voiced hateful views online toward Black, Muslim and LGBTQ people.

At the same time Pamela Fitzsimmons was a long-tenured staffer to Johnson, she maintained a [Twitter account](#) and a blog, [Held to Answer](#), where she repeatedly referred to Black people as criminals, railed against the Black Lives Matter movement, said Black civil rights organizations needed segregation and hate crimes for their survival, questioned whether a Black man wanted to be shot by police for publicity, called LGBTQ rights activists “bullies,” said transgender individuals who share their stories were attention-seeking and wrote that the U.S. Constitution “might be a lot worse” if Muslims had participated in its writing. She wrote her name at the end of each blog post.

Fitzsimmons worked as a part-time legislative aide to then-Democratic state Sen. Betsy Johnson from October 2011 to May 2012 and again from January 2014 until shortly after Johnson resigned to run for governor last December, according to Jessica Knieling, manager of employee services for the Legislature. Fitzsimmons was paid \$80,000 from October 2011 through October 2018, according to pay records obtained by The Oregonian/OregonLive for that specific period. Knieling wasn't able Friday to provide the newspaper with Fitzsimmons' pay for the rest of the time she was employed as a legislative staffer.

Johnson also paid Fitzsimmons during that time frame using campaign funds: \$76,000 from October 2012 to January 2019, according to state campaign finance records. Johnson's political action committee reported the payments were overwhelmingly for the general category of “management services” with a couple early payments for speechwriting.

In a statement provided to The Oregonian/OregonLive on Friday, Johnson said that Fitzsimmons worked for her as a researcher and drafter of policy materials and that she was not aware and had not read Fitzsimmons' personal blog or social media posts. She did not address whether she was aware of Fitzsimmons' views.

“Her views are her own and she is responsible for her own opinions and thoughts,” Johnson said in an emailed statement.

“Trying to attack me using someone else's views or actions is gutter-dwelling politics,” Johnson added. “As I have stated previously, I am absolutely against all forms of bigotry and intolerance, and that includes the Confederate flag on T-shirts and people's personal blog posts. This campaign should be about moving the state forward past politics of hate and division, not indulging in it.”

Fitzsimmons responded to an email from The Oregonian/OregonLive seeking comment by writing only, “Thanks for the publicity.”

On March 29, 2017 – when Fitzsimmons was receiving money both from Johnson's campaign coffers and as a part-time legislative staffer for Johnson – Fitzsimmons [wrote on her blog that](#) Quatrice Hayes, a Black teenager fatally shot by Portland police in 2017, had perhaps “fantasized about a cop killing him: His family would score a financial settlement, and he would be a celebrity with thousands of people taking to the streets to protest his death.”

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After Cameron Whitten, CEO for Brown Hope and co-founder of Black Resilience Fund, wrote an opinion piece published by The Oregonian/OregonLive last October calling on Portlanders to recommit to action on racial justice, Fitzsimmons tweeted, “Look who’s desperately hoping for another George Floyd. There’s money to be made! Considering how many black felons like to resist arrest, the wait shouldn’t be too long.”

Fitzsimmons said on her blog that she grew up in Medford and describes herself as a former longtime reporter and editor at newspapers in California and Washington who “wrote about gangs, drugs, deteriorating schools, urban sprawl, poverty and its offsprings: more babies, more poverty, more social problems.” She points to problems with “gangs” and “illegal immigration” as issues she saw in California that are also plaguing Oregon. On another blog, [Portland Dissent](#), where Fitzsimmons also posts opinion pieces, she refers to herself as a “former newspaper reporter/editor, now bearing witness to Portland’s self-destruction.”

Fitzsimmons previously worked for The Spokesman-Review in Spokane and The Columbian in Vancouver, according to a 2005 announcement on the The Spokesman-Review’s website.

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