

# Law enforcement: Agencies often come together for major crimes

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ones that send them where they need to go.”

The Umatilla County dispatch center is responsible for handling all emergency calls within the county, except for Oregon State Police and Milton-Freewater Police Department. When a call comes in from a landline, the dispatchers are notified of which agency’s jurisdiction the call’s coming from and which should respond, Liueallen said. If it’s from a cellphone, she added, the call appears on a map and dispatchers must identify the proper agency to contact.

In the event that a call arrives that’s intended for state or Milton-Freewater police or vice-versa, Lieualen said dispatchers are able to transfer calls to the right agency.

From there, the responding agency is able to make use of unified systems that stretch between the two counties as a part of the Umatilla Morrow Radio & Data District to coordinate with others if needed.

According to Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack, this radio and data system allows law enforcement to share information between agencies and quickly coordinate responses. The radio systems contain multiple channels, he said, allowing officers to either communicate across the region or focus on a particular area they are patrolling.

This came in handy last week for Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan, who began to respond to a report of a rolled vehicle when he was quickly called off by Stanfield Police Chief Bryon Zumwalt, who was already on his way to the scene.

Rowan said his deputies rely on the ability to quickly contact and be assisted by other agencies regularly, especially since they are often stationed on the outskirts of Pendleton and Hermiston away from other sheriff’s deputies.

### Being ready to help when needed

For small departments like Pilot Rock’s, which con-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan  
**Pendleton Police Officer Ben Carleton drives up Southgate in Pendleton in search of a subject with a warrant on Friday morning.**

sists of just three officers, the reassurance of having backup nearby is critical. Police Chief Bill Caldera spent 30 years as a police officer in Pendleton before taking the top position in Pilot Rock 3½ years ago, and said his relationship with Roberts and his department has been indispensable.

“I’ve got nothing but wonderful things to say about the support our department has got from Roberts and Pendleton over the years,” Caldera said. “And it’s a two-way street, we’re here to help anyone.”

Roberts said he’s happy to send anyone help who needs it, but has taken a more conservative approach when it comes to requesting it.

“My philosophy is I don’t ask for anything I don’t need,” he said.

Mostly, those needs tend to arise when the Pendleton Round-Up or Pendleton Whisky Music Fest bring thousands of visitors to the area.

During those events, Roberts said detectives from around the region are brought in so they are closer if a significant event occurs, and state police often provide mobile response units, which are troopers on bicycles who can more effectively manage large crowds.

At the Round-Up, however, Roberts said the sheriff’s office is contracted and has jurisdiction of the stadium

and grounds during that week.

In Morrow County, Matlack and his deputies primarily coordinate with the county’s only other police department in Boardman.

“They know if they get a case, or they need cover or a second officer for any reason, we’ll be there and assist each other on any given day at any given time,” he said.

Boardman Police Chief Rick Stokoe said building a strong relationship with Matlack and his office has been essential, and that his officers have benefited from training sessions with them in Heppner.

There are four other cities within Morrow County, none of which have their own police department. Heppner and Irrigon contract with the sheriff’s office, Matlack said, which means they have deputies stationed there ready to respond.

Additionally, those cities pay for the deputies’ vehicles that need to be replaced every three years. Matlack said they’ve also established a successful program within the contract that rotates the deputies’ former vehicles into the city fleet so they don’t go to waste.

The county’s remaining towns — Lone and Lexington — don’t contract the sheriff’s office for service but remain in its jurisdiction. Matlack and his deputies are responsible for emergency responses

to the area, he said, but typically they’re unable to provide code enforcement.

In Umatilla County, Rowan said Athena and Weston both contract for service while smaller communities like Helix, Adams and Ukiah don’t.

### Relationship goes beyond providing backup

Along with the ability for the counties to communicate and share data, at the heart of their relationship is the Umatilla County Jail.

Matlack said Morrow County hasn’t had its own jail since 1969, and now contracts with Umatilla County at a price of \$60 a day per person. Currently, this provides his office with 20 beds with a yearly price tag of \$500,000.

While it’s spendy, Matlack said they’ve shopped around and transported people to jails in Washington, and that prices in the Willamette Valley can climb as high as \$180 a day per person.

“It’s always geared toward where can I find the best deal,” Matlack said.

### State police presence in the region

Standing by ready to help both the county and municipal agencies are more than 30 state troopers spread throughout the region.

“That’s our primary mission, to work and support

other agencies,” said Lt. Karl Farber, who serves in Pendleton’s state command center. “If an agency asks for our support, then we’re going to lend as much help as we can.”

The state police’s jurisdiction remains locked with the right-of-way corridor of state highways within the region, and often troopers are responding to car crashes; however, troopers are also there to assist with pursuits and investigations.

On Monday, for example, the state’s bomb squad was called to assist Hermiston PD when a traffic stop ended with the discovery of a grenade. Farber said in cases like that, troopers will assist until they’re no longer needed and then hand the rest of the evidence to the lead agency.

Oregon State Police also have access to resources to model and investigate car crashes that local agencies can utilize.

### Working across state lines

Highway patrols sometimes yield responses to incidents along state lines for troopers as well.

Last month, freezing fog and slippery road conditions led to a 23-car pileup that temporarily closed down the Umatilla Bridge between Oregon and Washington and required cooperation between state troopers on both sides.

As Farber explained, Oregon and Washington State Police’s jurisdiction splits down the middle of the bridge, and troopers worked together to clear their respective sides.

In Hermiston, Edmiston said he and his officers maintain relationships with departments in Southern Washington, such as Walla Walla, Kennewick and others.

Edmiston said he and some officers attend a yearly breakfast hosted by Kennewick Police Chief Ken Hohenberg and featuring other departments in the Tri-Cities area. “We know that criminals don’t recognize the border between Washington and Oregon,” Edmiston said.

### Major crime cases

What brings all the agencies together, however, are

major crimes and drug enforcement.

The Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team, or BENT, includes members from Morrow and Umatilla counties, Boardman, Milton-Freewater, Hermiston, Pendleton, the Umatilla Tribal Police, Oregon State Police, the FBI and the U.S. Coast Guard. The team works separately from other agencies in the region and is dedicated to investigating and disrupting high-level drug trafficking organizations.

The Umatilla Morrow Major Crime Team was activated Monday to investigate a homicide in Milton-Freewater, and consists of detectives, officers and resources from the Oregon State Police, Umatilla and Morrow counties, Pendleton, and Hermiston.

The team only forms when a major crime occurs, and is led by whichever agency’s jurisdiction the crime occurred in. Sheriff Rowan said the size of the team is determined by the magnitude of the crime.

According to Sheriff Matlack, spots on the team are reserved for only those who can handle it.

“They all carry their own load and share everyone else,” he said.

Rowan, who previously worked as a detective in Hermiston, said these major crime teams are where communication between agencies can be critical.

“They may have the missing link that carries a case all the way through its conclusion,” he said.

To keep connections between agencies strong, sheriffs, chiefs and law enforcement throughout the region try and gather once a month to discuss any important cases or statewide news and policies that may impact them locally.

Along with everything else local law enforcement shares, what stands above it all is a shared commitment to helping each other.

“I just like to think that in law enforcement we’re all a part of a big family,” Rowan said. “And we’re there to tend to each other’s needs.”

# Climate: Diesel and gasoline emission capping to be phased in over several years

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Dembrow said in an interview they are proposing four big changes from last year’s effort that derailed the Legislature.

The first change, Dembrow said, is that capping emissions from gasoline and diesel would be phased in over the next several years. Fuel importers would not have to get emissions allowances with respect to rural areas of the state, though those areas could opt in to the regulations if they want.

Starting in two years, fuel suppliers in the Portland metro area must obtain allowances. Three years later, in 2025, suppliers delivering to areas receiving more than 10 million gallons of fuel would be covered by the program and face new limits.

The second change corresponds to how industrial users of natural gas would be regulated. The utilities or marketers supplying the gas would deal with the corresponding allowances.

The new plan would also set aside money for environmental initiatives like wildfire prevention and forest health, and task the Department of Environmental Quality with regulating the system.

Lawmakers dropped the idea of setting up a new state agency to manage the program.

State Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay, said that change emerged out of conversations with legislators opposed to the program last year, many of whom were worried about creating a new state agency at a cost of millions.

“I really see this as one of the ways in which we have eliminated creating new bureaucracy in the state,” Roblan said.

Various iterations of the proposal have been passed around the Capitol in recent months. One version dated Dec. 23, 2019, spanned 100 pages of dense text.

But it’s not a sure bet that the latest proposal will float on Oregon’s choppy political seas.

## “WE’RE CONTINUING TO HEAR FROM PEOPLE CONCERNED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND A NEED TO MOVE FORWARD”

Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland

Last year’s effort prompted Republicans to storm out of the building — and the state. The Republican senators returned only after they were assured that Democrats didn’t have enough votes to pass the policy.

The latest version of the plan began in the garage of the state Capitol.

That’s where Roblan and Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, started talking about what could be done to address greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon, per Roblan’s account.

Their chat became the seed of a plan shared by Roblan and Dembrow with reporters on Thursday.

While the effort started out on informal and amicable terms, Girod is no longer involved in the crafting of

the policy, telling *The Oregonian* that changes intended to accommodate rural Oregon in the bill were “fake” and disdaining the process.

Girod didn’t respond to phone and email messages from the Oregon Capital Bureau seeking comment on Thursday.

Dembrow said while Girod may be stepping back, he and Roblan “continue to take his perspective into consideration.”

Down in the garage, Girod had mentioned to Roblan their work on Cleaner Air Oregon — a recent bipartisan effort to clean up air pollution — and asked Roblan if he wanted to “have a conversation” on greenhouse gas emissions, Roblan said.

“I said, ‘Sure, that’d be

great,” Roblan said. “So we started having some conversations. We brought in some different experts that could help us and eventually decided we really needed to make sure that Sen. Dembrow was involved because this was really a Senate kind of thing. And, so eventually it grew to a bigger group of people and ... conversations kept going. We got a lot of help from experts from the governor’s office.”

Roblan said the proposal is a work in progress.

“We have a lot of work, I think, left to do,” Roblan said.

The plan is a priority for Gov. Kate Brown in the 2020 session. After the policy hit a political brick wall last year, she threatened to use her executive powers to mandate the creation of an emissions policy. And pressure to develop a politically viable plan is also coming from environmental groups, which have been proposing ballot measures that would ask the voters to impose changes instead of the Legislature.

In December, Brown

appeared to suggest that Republicans would want to stay in the Capitol if they could get legislative relief from ever-intensifying wildfires while the greenhouse gas initiative moved ahead.

“I would hate for the Legislature as a whole not to take up forest health and wildfire resilience when we have this opportunity and, frankly, a road map,” Brown said at the time.

“We’re continuing to hear from people concerned about climate change and a need to move forward, have Oregon step up and be a leader and deal with what we’re really experiencing as a state in terms of fires and water problems and other issues, snowpack, obviously,” Dembrow said.

“But, at the same time, recognizing the concerns that especially rural Oregonians feel about their livelihoods, their jobs, and their ability to make ends meet. And so, you know, I think we have committed to coming up with a program recognizing both of those needs.”

# Voters: Although voter registration is up, unaffiliated voters are still not casting ballots

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dell said of unaffiliated voters. “They’re not nominating someone forward that they hope to see on the ballot in November.”

She said even if someone didn’t like the choices a party is presenting, if they belong to a party they at least have the option to write someone in. Some registered Republicans in Umatilla County wrote in Hillary Clinton’s name during the Republican primary election in 2016, for example.

Turnout data from general elections suggests many unaf-

filiated voters still don’t turn out for the elections in which their ballot looks exactly the same as any Republican’s or Democrat’s choices, however.

In November 2018, 47.5% of unaffiliated voters in Oregon turned in ballots for the general election, compared with 81.8% of Democrats and 81.1% of Republicans. In November 2016, 61% of unaffiliated Oregon voters turned in a ballot for the general election, compared with 87.9% of Democrats and 89.3% of Republicans.

In Umatilla County, overall turnout rate is lower than

state averages, but unaffiliated voters still turn in their ballot in relatively lower numbers than their peers belonging to a party. In Nov. 2018, 34.7% of unaffiliated voters in Umatilla County voted, compared with 69.4% of Democrats and 77.2% of Republicans.

While the motor voter bill may have increased the number of unaffiliated voters — and, by extension, the ratio of unaffiliated voters who don’t turn in ballots — turnout numbers from 2014 and 2012, before the motor voter law went into effect, suggest even those unaffiliated voters

who took the initiative to register themselves are less likely to send in a ballot.

During the 2014 general election 57.6% of unaffiliated voters in Oregon turned in ballots, compared with 77.2% of Republicans and 75.9% of Democrats. In the 2012 general — a presidential election — 71.7% of unaffiliated voters turned in ballots compared with 86.3% of Republicans and 87.9% of Democrats.

Lindell said she and other elections managers in the state face a lot of unknowns for the election this May. While it won’t technically be the first

presidential primary since the motor voter bill passed, in spring 2016 the law was brand new and few people had been automatically registered yet.

Theoretically, a tight race for the Democratic nomination for President could spark a sudden interest in voting for large numbers of people who were automatically registered as unaffiliated in the last few years. They would have until 21 days before the May 19 election to change their party affiliation, even though the elections office gets started on preparing ballots and stuffing envelopes far before then.

“I’m thinking, what if people all decide to do it on the 21st day before the election? ... For me, it’s kind of scary not knowing what to expect,” Lindell said.

For anyone who is wondering if they were automatically registered to vote, if they have the correct mailing address on file with the elections office or what their official party affiliation is, they can check or update their registration online at oregonvotes.gov, contact the Umatilla County elections office at 541-278-6254 or visit the office at 216 S.E. Fourth St., Suite 18, in Pendleton.