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CAPITOL BREACH

Insurrection felt from D.C. to Oregon

Former Hermiston resident in the Capitol covering the events for Arkansas newspaper

By ANTONIO SIERRA AND
JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Washington, D.C., is about 2,500 miles away from Eastern Oregon, but the reverberations were felt across the country.

As a part of an insurrection, a mob of people pushed past police to breach the U.S. Capitol building on Wednesday, Jan. 6, as lawmakers were in the process of certifying Joe Biden's victory over President Donald Trump. Legislators were escorted to safety, and although they eventually proceeded with the vote, the siege left five dead.



Lockwood

The journalist

One former Hermiston resident was at the Capitol on Jan. 6, not as a protester or a lawmaker, but as a journalist.

Frank E. Lockwood, a Hermiston High School graduate who covered sports for the *East Oregonian* during high school in the 1980s, is the Washington, D.C., correspondent for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. He said on Jan. 6 he was rotating back and forth between listening to speeches in the House and Senate, and each time he walked past the windows facing outside the building, he could see an unruly crowd growing larger.

"I realized, 'They won't be able to keep them out,'" he said.

When he returned to the House chambers for the last time, he could hear protesters had entered the building. It was a "high-stress" situation, he said.

"You would hear snippets of information over police radio," he said. "Reports kept coming in, and they were getting more and more alarming — calls for backup, updates that things were getting out of control, reports that tear gas had been deployed."

Soon, Capitol Police down below were using heavy furniture to barricade the doors into the chamber as protesters smashed the windows

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EO SPOTLIGHT

'I might not make it home'

Hundreds fall ill, two die amid COVID-19 surge at Two Rivers Correctional Institution

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Brandon Baker was already feeling symptoms when officials at Two Rivers Correctional Institution carried out a sick inmate from two cells down.

Another inmate, four cells away, said he saw the same inmate lying on his bed ill for nearly two weeks, receiving little care.

"He looked like death," the inmate, who asked for anonymity out of fear of retaliation, said. "I walked by and told him, 'Get better bro' and he didn't even move. Like, comatose on his bed."

The sick inmate, who was between 50 and 60 years old and was serving his sentence at TRCI, reportedly died on Saturday, Jan. 2, after testing positive for COVID-19, according to a press release that did not identify him by name. He's one of two inmates who have recently died as the institution endures the largest surge in COVID-19 cases among prisons in Oregon, with 235 active cases as of Wednesday, Jan. 6, according to data from the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC).

"They aren't actually doing anything," Baker, who said he tested positive for COVID-19 around the first of the year, said of prison staff. "Right now, somebody could be in their cell dying and they wouldn't know anything about it because they're locked in their cell, not being monitored, not being anything. They're just locked in their cell."

Baker is one of 393 inmates at TRCI who have reportedly tested positive for COVID-19 since Dec. 10, 2020, according to data from the department of corrections. Since the beginning of December 2020, 50 TRCI staff have also tested positive.

Interviews with four inmates, eight people with loved ones in the prison, and two attorneys with more than 20 clients at TRCI, illuminate the conditions adults in custody are facing as the prison is rocked by the case spike. They described to the *East Oregonian* inconsistent mask wearing among



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Nearly 400 inmates at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla have reportedly tested positive for COVID-19 since Dec. 10, 2020, according to data from the department of corrections. Since the beginning of December 2020, 50 TRCI staff have also tested positive.

prison staff, failures to both maintain social distancing and to separate quarantined and non-quarantined inmates, meager and expired food supplies, and an environment that has put inmates and prison staff at risk of infection since a power outage left the east side of the institution largely in the dark on Dec. 16, 2020.

The power was restored on Dec. 24, 2020, according to officials. But since then, infection has surged rapidly, with 281 additional inmates and 40 staff reportedly testing positive.

"Just because they're an inmate doesn't mean they don't have people out there who love them," said Erika Sjolander, whose husband, an inmate at TRCI, was rushed to the hospital on Thursday, Jan. 7, four days after testing positive in the outbreak.

Sjolander's husband, who she said was to be released from the prison in 27 days, has asthma, diabetes and has gone through chemotherapy for cancer. She's worried he won't make it.

"He called me (on Wednesday, Jan. 6), and he could barely talk," she said, crying. "And he says, 'Tell my kids I love them. I might not make it home.' And hearing that is breaking my heart."

Baker and the anonymous inmate each said that since the virus began to spread through the prison in mid-December, infect-

ing hundreds and forcing their unit into quarantine, prison staff had only conducted brief daily checks for temperature and symptoms.

They are released from their cells once a day for a brief phone call, which Troy Marin, an inmate, said is due to the shortage of staff caused by the outbreak.

In an email to the *EO* newsroom, officials from the department of corrections did not respond to multiple questions regarding the source's allegations of minimal medical care, but said, "DOC employees are making decisions based on medical and operational expertise," and added staff are limited by "institution design" and the number of hospital beds available for COVID-19 patients across the state.

Officials said inmates who require medical attention beyond what is available at the prison are transferred to hospitals. The officials did not respond to questions regarding the circumstances around the sick inmate in the cell near Baker who died.

Statewide surge

The surge at TRCI comes as the state's prison system endures a significant spike in cases, with 545 active cases among adults in custody as of Jan. 6, according to ODOC data. Only three of the state's 15 prisons do

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Two Rivers Correctional Institution is bathed in the afternoon sun on Thursday, Jan. 7, 2021. The prison is in the middle of the largest surge in COVID-19 cases among prisons in Oregon, with 235 active cases as of Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021, according to data from the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

COVID-19 NUMBERS IN UMATILLA COUNTY

TOTALS FOR WEEK ENDING 1/9/2021



RISK LEVEL HIGH	NEW WEEKLY CASES 878	TOTAL CASE GOAL 40 OR LESS OVER 2 WEEKS	POSITIVE TEST RATE 18.8%	POSITIVE TEST GOAL 5%
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