

Massive traffic smash-up blocked I-84 for most of the day on Monday, February 21

BY ANDREW CUTLER, DICK MASON, ERICK PETERSON, ANTONIO SIERRA, ALEX WITTWER AND PHIL WRIGHT
EO Media Group

PENDLETON — The Hyatt family on Monday, Feb. 21, was heading west on Interstate 84, bound for their home in Yelm, Washington, when they became involved in one of the biggest traffic smash-ups in Eastern Oregon in years.

Marjorie, a kindergarten assistant, her husband, Carter Hyatt, a vocational therapist, and their son, Jacob, a sophomore in high school, were returning from a trip to Utah, where they were a part of their daughter's engagement, including picking out her dress and ring.

"We had a wonderful weekend," Carter said.

On the way back in their Nissan Pathfinder, they stopped in Boise to spend the night of Feb. 20 with Jacob's brother, then headed out the morning of Feb. 21 for the final leg of the trek home.

Marjorie was asleep, Jacob was in the backseat watching one of "The Lord of the Rings" movies and Carter was driving. He said they were going to stop at the rest area at Deadman Pass, near milepost 229, when he saw jackknifed semitrailers on the road ahead.

"I kind of swerved," he recalled. "I was able to miss a couple of cars and trucks."

But he tapped the brakes, he said, and lost control of the car.

The front of their Nissan smashed into the rear driver's side of an Amazon semitrailer. The collision tore apart the front of the car, and the engine ended up on the asphalt.

But the Nissan's safety features worked well, Carter said. The air bags, seat belts and crumple zones protected the family.

"We're all pretty much fine," Marjorie said.

The Hyatts were part of a series of crashes that began at around noon near milepost 230 and involved as many as 98 vehicles, according to press releases from the Oregon Department of Transportation and Oregon State Police. And



Antonio Sierra/East Oregonian

Emergency crews respond to the scene of a mass crash involving dozens of vehicles Monday, Feb. 21, 2022, on Interstate 84 about 21 miles east of Pendleton.

while the total number of injured was unknown, OSP as of late Feb. 21 had not reported any fatalities in the pileup that stretched for a mile.

Interstate 84 shuts down

The mass crash shut down the westbound and eastbound lanes of the freeway in Eastern Oregon. Eastbound remained closed Feb. 21 between Exit 216, 6 miles east of Pendleton, and Exit 265 at La Grande, while westbound was closed to between Exit 374 at Ontario and Exit 216.

Oregon State Police, local law enforcement, fire and medics from agencies throughout Umatilla and Union counties responded, along with help from Walla Walla County in Washington. Pendleton Fire Chief Jim Critchley said the wrecks stretched for a mile. The Hyatts described the response as impressive.

Responding officers were notified of additional crashes while they were arriving, and then once on scene, officers could hear crashes occurring behind them, according to a press release from the

OSP. The Hyatts heard those crashes, too.

"Bam, bam, bam," Carter Hyatt said. "They just kept hitting."

Marjorie said the sounds were unnerving. They stayed in their vehicle, even without heat, for protection.

Capt. Merle Laci with the La Grande Fire Department said two ambulances and one rescue rig were on scene from Union County, with crews from Union and Island City fire departments on standby. The La Grande Fire Department sent eight personnel to the scene.

As of 3:35 p.m., rescue vehicles and ambulances from the La Grande Fire Department had returned to the station, according to Laci. La Grande Fire Department confirmed they had transported three individuals from the scene to Grande Ronde Hospital.

Nick Oatley, spokesperson with Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, confirmed the Hermiston-based fire department also responded, but he did not have specifics on

how many personnel were on scene. Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston reported it did not receive any crash victims.

Hospitals at the ready

Elaine LaRoche, incident commander at Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande, activated the hospital's incident command system, according to a press release from Mardi Ford, public information officer.

"We are preparing to support any patients sent our way with emergency services and medical care," Ford said in the release. "We do not have any news on distribution of patients to be sent our way. However, we are prepared to assist in this emergency. We are cooperating fully with all regional partners, including our media contacts, to do what we can to keep everyone informed. Our primary mission, however, is to provide emergency services and medical care to patients in need. Once we know more, we will issue an update."

Emily Smith, director of communications for St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton, reported that as of 3 p.m., the hospital received six patients from the crash.

"The patients' statuses are unknown at this time," she reported, "and no information on ages etc. is available to the media at this time."

Smith also explained how St. Anthony responds to these kinds of crises.

"When we receive word of an incident like this, the hospital activates Code D, or disaster response," according to Smith. "Available staff (off-duty) are called and asked to come in based on current personnel needs as well as staffing for the next shift. Patients are seen in the Emergency Department as well as other care areas of the hospital as appropriate for their level of injury. We have an extensive disaster plan that is drilled with local emergency response teams to ensure we are prepared for situations like this when they arise."

Pendleton Convention Center provides respite

The Hyatts said emergency personnel checked on them often, and they appreciated that. And many of the other people in the crash helped each other, they said, offering water and making sure people were OK. "There were people, regular people," Marjorie Hyatt said. "All that was really nice."

When school buses arrived to carry the Hyatts and so many more off the mountain, they said they had to cross the median to the eastbound lanes. Marjorie banged her knee on the fence, but firefighters were right there to help. And when they got on the bus, she said, the Oregon State Police trooper who was the person to check on them assisted them onto the bus.

The buses took groups to the Pendleton Convention Center, where its manager, Pat Beard, said while the facility was holding events that day, it opened rooms for the people in the crash and provided what hospitality it could while they waited for rides from family or friends or made arrangements for other accommodations.

The center also served as a base of operations for law enforcement, Umatilla County Public Health and more. Beard praised the coordination he witnessed between the different groups.

The Hyatts were among the last from the crash to still be at the convention center that evening. Bags of chips and other snacks lined the long tables of the large room. A family member was on the way to help get them home, they said, probably around 7 that night.

The Nissan, as far as they knew, still was at the site of the crash. Carter said all their luggage was in the car, so he anticipated making a trip back to gather their belongings.

The Hyatts said they had never experienced anything like this emergency, and they did not want to be in another. But their concerns were for others.

"I hope everyone gets out," Marjorie said.

Books

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Here is one example:

- Genre: historical romance
- Recommended for: lovers of Shakespeare retellings
- First line of the book: "Benedick Scott was on his way to freedom or profound failure or, if the usual order of things held up, both."
- Chosen by: Missy

Each label also has the book's barcode, so patrons can check it out and still not know the title.

After finishing the book, readers are asked to return the bookmark with responses to questions — and a chance to win a prize.

"You rate your date," Grammon said.

The questions are:

- What was your first impression? (love at first sight, interesting, meh, or no chemistry)
- Describe your date in one word.

- Would you go on a second date with this author? (definitely or we're gonna be just friends).

The "Blind Date with a Book" started Feb. 7 to precede Valentine's Day, and selections included quite a few historical and contemporary romance. Genres have branched out to other selections, such as graphic novels and horror.

As books are checked out, Grammon and Snyder select new ones to wrap for the display.

"We've definitely had fun with this one," Grammon said.

The program ends March 14.

Grammon hopes that this "blind date" approach will introduce readers to a book they might not otherwise pick up.

"That's the goal," she said.

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Rep. Owens' bill to limit governor's power stalls

BY BENNETT HALL

Blue Mountain Eagle

CRANE — An effort by an Eastern Oregon lawmaker to rein in the governor's emergency powers may be effectively dead, at least for now.

Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, said in an email update to constituents on Friday, Feb. 18, that House Joint Resolution 206 is stalled in the House Rules Committee and that the committee chair has said it will not get a hearing before the 2022 Legislature adjourns.

"I introduced and sponsored this bill, so I'm disappointed it didn't move forward this session," Owens wrote in the email. "Until there's a change from the top down, I will continue to pursue legislation that brings accountability to our government."

According to a summary on the state legislative website, the measure was referred to the Rules Committee after its first reading but has gone nowhere since. It has not yet had a committee hearing, and no hearings or floor votes are scheduled.

HJR 206 would amend the state Constitution to limit both the governor's ability to declare an emergency and the special powers the governor could wield under an emergency declaration.

It also would limit an emergency declaration to 30 days, with counties — not the governor — having the power to extend the declaration within their borders in 30-day increments. County governments would also have the power to reduce, but not expand, the state powers



Blue Mountain Eagle, File

State Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, speaks to constituents on Nov. 10, 2021, at the Squeeze-In Restaurant and Deck in John Day.

granted by the emergency declaration within their borders.

Other provisions would prohibit the governor from retaliating against any county that did not fully extend the emergency declaration and give the Legislature the power to terminate an emergency declaration.

Finally, before taking effect, the proposed constitutional amendment would require approval by a majority of Oregon voters.

Oregon has been under a state of emergency since March 8, 2020, when Gov. Kate Brown announced plans to take extraordinary measures to protect Oregonians from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brown has extended the state of emergency several times since then.

State-imposed measures aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19 have helped keep Oregon's infection and death rates from the coronavirus lower than in most other states.

But they have also sparked pushback from many Oregonians angered by school closures, masking requirements, vaccine mandates and business restrictions.

Local control emerged as a hot-button issue for Grant County residents in August after Brown made an about-face on her June 30 executive order, which handed over public health decisions to counties amid a resurgence of COVID-19.

With case counts soaring from the rapidly spreading delta variant, Brown issued a flurry of new executive orders requiring masks in schools, inside state buildings and, finally, all indoor public spaces.

Those moves drew the ire of Grant County leaders, who signed onto a letter from the Eastern Oregon Counties Association calling for local control of school districts.

In addition to Owens, Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, is also listed as a chief sponsor of HJR 206. Other chief sponsors of the measure are Reps. Jessica George, R-Keizer; Lily Morgan, R-Grants Pass; E. Werner Reschke, R-southern Klamath and Lake counties; and Sens. Dick Anderson, R-Lincoln City; and Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer.

Councilor

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She said her hope as a councilor was to lend a new voice, a different generational view and possibly an alternative perspective to the seven-member Council.

"My commitment until March 1, is to help support any way I can with the transition, especially to the boards and commissions I sit on today," she said.

"My original desire for taking part in council doesn't change. I continue to have many friends, family, local business owners, educators, city staff, self employed heroes, hospital workers and more and who I will always want to see succeed in our

great community."

Sells urged the remaining six councilors to replace her "quickly."

"Encourage others to apply and select an individual who deeply cares for the future of our community," she said. "Someone who can come in with new ideas, interests, questions, perspective and understanding to help you push forward. We mustn't put personal needs above community needs — and you'll need all seven voices to get through the next challenges that lie ahead."

"I also encourage our community to get more involved. Know who you are voting for on the ballot, attend council, county and board meetings, learn about the changes that are coming up in your com-

munity, and speak out in public hearings — it really makes a difference to get involved."

The most recent vacancy on the Council, created when Lynette Perry resigned in August 2021 due to health issues, remained unfilled for about 4 months, until councilors appointed Dean Guyer on Dec. 14, 2021.

Sells concluded by thanking those who supported her as a councilor, and those who she met during her tenure.

"I'd also like to thank those who haven't agreed with me, as you've challenged and encouraged me to stand up for what I believe in, and what I believe those who voted me in also stand for," she said.

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Raiden James Leroy Monges

June 16, 2020 - February 15, 2022

Raiden James Leroy Monges, 19 months old, received his angel wings on February 15, 2022, surrounded by the love of his family and friends at Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City. A celebration of life/reception will be held at the Baker Elks Lodge on Sunday, March 6, 2022, at 2:30 p.m. Raiden's favorite foods - spaghetti and macaroni and cheese - will be served as we share memories of our sweet boy.

Raiden made his dramatic debut into this world on June 16, 2020, around 4 a.m. via emergency C-section in Baker City, Oregon. He weighed in at 5 pounds, 9 ounces and was 19½ inches long. Raiden was born with blue eyes and a full head of fabulous hair that he grew out during his life.

Raiden had many nicknames including Bubs, Bubbi, lil man, Raisin, and lil Raisin Bran. His sister Maddilynn liked to call him "Raiden James."

At 7 months old Raiden experienced his first seizure. These seizures continued to worsen and by 9 months old he was diagnosed with Dravet Syndrome, a rare form of epilepsy.

Raiden enjoyed giving "knuckles" and would always greet you with a "hi!" He had the type of smile that could bring a smile to anyone. One thing he did not like was wearing socks.

Some of his favorite things included cats and trying to pick them up, hiding the remote, eating pork rinds, soft things and throwing things into the trash can. He had fun playing with his sissy, being chased, cuddles, playing with dolls, getting tickled, stomping around in shoes, trying to dress himself and dancing. He would often yell, "Moom-mmy"! Raiden loved water and baths, growling at daddy's tattoos, listening to music with daddy and watching the "Princess and Frog" with mommy. He liked spending time with papa watching "Moana" every day when mommy and daddy were at work and was papa's little buddy. He also liked packing nana's chew, knocking on the door and yelling for Mimi (his nana), foot rubs and putting his feet on mommy's face. Raiden especially loved giving kisses to mommy, daddy and sissy. He was a kind-hearted boy who had the biggest of hearts.

He was preceded in death by his grandma Charity Monges and grandpa Vernon Koons.

Raiden is survived by his loving parents Kaylalynn and Micheal Monges; sister Maddilynn Monges; nana Tori Benintendi and papa Mark Benintendi; grandpas Bill Monges and Brad Parson; great-grandparents Hazel and Terry Benintendi, Ron and Juanita Streifel, and Helen Reid; uncles Tyler Koons, Keven Koch, and Justin Benintendi; aunt Ashley Hughes; cousins Peyton and Harper Hughes, Asher, Ariaah, Kelly and Charity and Casey and Damien Monges; special furpal, his pup Azazeal.

For those who would like to make a memorial donation in honor of Raiden the family suggests the Dravet Syndrome Foundation through Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home and Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway, Oregon 97834. Online condolences can be shared at www.tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.

