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## Leg amputation has not held Jacob Hansen back



BY LAURA KUSSMAN  
Sounder contributor

In the 14 months since his left leg was amputated just below the knee, Jacob Hansen has grown from struggling to walk with a walker to skateboarding with his 3-year-old daughter Harper.

Hansen said while visiting close friends in the San Juans, he and his family plan to visit the skateparks on all three islands.

“Orcas’ skatepark is the best one, though,” he shared, smiling on a sunny August morning on the deck of the Orcas Hotel, awaiting the arrival of the inter-island ferry. “I don’t drop in [the halfpipe] anymore. I still have some flashbacks of my knee hyperextending.”

Hansen, who lived on Lopez Island

until the age of 10, followed by Orcas for another eight years, now sports a “Level 4” lower limb prosthetic, which he says are chiefly reserved by insurance companies for paid or extreme sports athletes. Hansen and his physical therapist had to document and prove his regular biking, running and rugby practice in order to obtain it. He and his family live in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.

“I have more hobbies now than I ever have. If I see a hobby I’m interested in, I have to do it to prove that I can,” Hansen said. “I remember being at St. Luke’s Rehabilitation facility [in Spokane, Washington]. All I wanted was to be able to play soccer with my daughter. I’m able to do that now and so much more. We went on a five-mile hike the other day. I still play



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

At left: Jacob Hansen and his wife Lauren Wimmer, Above: Jacob and his daughter Harper.

sandwiches,” Hansen laughs. “The best was a lamb sandwich that Alan Coe brought me.”

Over time, a subsequent pressure sore on the sole of his foot as well as a grievous infection in his knee led Hansen, his wife Lauren Wimmer and their families to make the decision for amputation.

“Lauren has been my rock throughout this. She’s been a big advocate for me. We spent my daughter’s first birthday in the hospital. You can believe that was really hard for her. She expects more of me, she pushes me and challenges me constantly because she wants what’s best for me. She’s my toughest critic because she believes in me,” Hansen said.

“This will give Jacob the best opportunity to have a ‘normal life’ again,” Wimmer wrote in a crowdfunding campaign she initiated in June 2019. In just shy of three months, they had successfully raised \$12,334 from 134 donors. Both Wimmer and Hansen say the financial burden on their family was substantial but made much less cumbersome with help and generosity from their community.

In order to get him back on his feet, Hansen had to do three sessions a week of physical therapy, but insurance only covered 10 sessions a year. He says he wants people to know the amputation has been an improvement, not something that holds him back.

“I never got around to thanking everyone who donated. That made all the difference in the world. Without that, we would’ve had to file bankruptcy and potentially move back in with a family member. I don’t know what we would’ve done,” Hansen said. “Look, it worked! No regrets. I’m really happy with who I am and where I’m at.”

As the ferry approaches, Hansen stands to retreat to his vehicle. A person who had been seated adjacent stops him.

“I couldn’t help but hear your story. I’m a retired rugby player,” they say, gesturing toward their t-shirt to prove it. “How you’ve handled yourself and your attitude about everything...it’s really inspiring.”

no-tackle rugby. I sprint once a week. If I could do a half triathlon, that would be a huge accomplishment to myself. You have to learn new truths. I’ve had to ask myself, ‘what am I totally comfortable with?’”

Hansen sustained an injury in 2018 while playing rugby with the North Idaho Osprey Men’s Rugby team. In what he calls a “freak accident,” Hansen’s leg was dislocated so severely during a tackle it tore the nerve and veins behind his knee, causing him to lose function in his left foot. Hansen lost over half the blood in his body from compartment syndrome and received a blood transfusion. In the hospital, Hansen was visited by friends, family and his rugby teammates. His best piece of advice if you find yourself bedridden? Tell people to bring you sandwiches. “I got to try tons of delicious

## Congress acts to stop USPS service reductions

BY MANDI JOHNSON  
Journal editor

As the 2020 General Election nears, new concerns regarding mail-in voting have been heightened by a nationwide reduction of the United States Postal Service.

“The United States Postal Service is not a luxury — it is a necessity,” Rep. Rick Larsen said in an Aug. 22 press release. “Washingtonians rely on the postal service to cast their votes, fill lifesaving prescriptions, conduct business and stay in touch with family, friends and neighbors.”

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy began cutting overtime

Subscriber mailing label below this line

and limiting post office hours after he was appointed in June.

On Aug. 22, the United States Congress passed the Delivering for America Act, which would prohibit USPS from implementing or approving any changes to operations or service levels during the duration of the pandemic — including moving mail sorting machines and mailboxes, other than for routine maintenance. It also provides \$25 billion in emergency funding requested by the USPS and supported by the Trump-appointed Postal Board of Governors in April; requires USPS to treat all official election mail as First-Class mail and ensure all election mail is postmarked; and reverses any changes already implemented to USPS operations or policies that delay mail delivery.

“This bill will put a stop to policies like prohibiting overtime and removing sorting machines that endanger Americans’ health, harm the economy and undermine voting rights,” Larsen said. “President Trump’s primary motivation for attacking the USPS is clear: prevent mail-in voting. I have spoken with county auditors in my district who are confident the mail-in ballot system has checks and balances to catch fraud, if it does occur. Any other state can do what Washington state is doing and conduct successful elections via mail.”

On Aug. 18, DeJoy had announced the USPS would not be making any proposed changes until after the election, however, sorting machines and blue boxes across the country had already been removed. Five days earlier, CNN published an article saying it had obtained

documents indicating that 671 machines used to organize letters and other pieces of mail were slated for “reduction” in dozens of U.S. cities in 2020.

On the morning of Aug. 18, prior to DeJoy’s backtracking on his plans for USPS, Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson announced he was leading a coalition of states filing a lawsuit challenging the operational changes. DeJoy’s original reductions included stopping mail processing at three of the state’s five distribution centers — Wenatchee, Yakima and Tacoma.

“Closing these centers significantly harms rural communities, often significantly increasing the distance mail must travel. Mail sent from one address to another in the same town would have to travel all the way to one of the remaining distribution centers and back again before being delivered,” a press release from Ferguson’s office said. “For example, a letter sent from Yakima to a location across town will be sent all the way to Spokane for processing and then back to Yakima.”

In the lawsuit, Ferguson asserted that “the Postmaster General implemented these drastic changes to mail service unlawfully, and seeks to stop the service reductions.”

The reduction in service comes amid continued claims by Trump that vote-by-mail would lead to voter fraud, Ferguson said. Washington has allowed elections to be conducted by mail-in ballot since 2005 and mandated the practice statewide in 2011 without any significant voter fraud, according to a press release from the attorney general’s office.

“For partisan gain, President

Trump is attempting to destroy a critical institution that is essential for millions of Americans,” Ferguson said. “We rely on the Postal Service for our Social Security benefits, prescriptions — and exercising our right to vote. Our coalition will fight to protect the Postal Service and uphold the rule of law in federal court.”

The changes had already resulted in mail delays, Ferguson said. The changes already implemented included eliminating staff overtime; prohibiting mail carriers from returning to distribution centers to pick up more mail to deliver; decommissioning sorting machines, reducing sorting capacity by 10 percent; removing mailboxes; and no longer treating election mail as first-class, delaying delivery to voters.

“In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that we fiercely protect the democratic right to vote for all Americans, and simultaneously, the physical safety of voters,” Ferguson said earlier this month. “Expansion of vote-by-mail options across the country allows us to achieve both.”

It isn’t just elections a reduction in postal service affects, utility bills, prescriptions and social security benefits are all subject to delay if mail service is reduced. This greatly affects seniors, a press release from Ferguson’s office explained.

“The policy changes have already impacted our country’s veterans, who are reporting much longer wait times to receive mail-order prescription drugs,” the press release said.

According to the release from Ferguson’s office, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

fills about 80 percent of veteran prescriptions by mail.

“The VA processes about 120 million mail-order prescriptions per year — 470,000 a day,” the release said. “The Postal Service makes daily prescription deliveries to 330,000 veterans across the country.”

Ferguson asserted in his lawsuit that the Postmaster General acted outside of his authority to implement changes to the postal system and did not follow the proper procedures under federal law. According to Ferguson, the law requires that USPS changes with a nationwide effect in mail service must be submitted to the Postal Regulatory Commission, which evaluates the proposal through a procedure that includes public notice and comment.

Washington is leading the lawsuit, and is joined by Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin.

“I will do everything in my power to help ensure all Washingtonians have access to the full range of services offered by the USPS — especially their constitutional right to participate in state, local and federal elections,” Gov. Jay Inslee said in an Aug. 17 statement. “We are fortunate in this state to have Attorney General Bob Ferguson working to support our rights and we will continue to explore all ways to protect our voting rights in Washington.”