

Seattle protester killed after being struck by car driving wrong way on closed interstate

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One protester is dead and another remains in serious condition at the Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, Washington after being struck by a vehicle driven by a Seattle man, 27-year-old Dawit Kelete during an early Saturday morning protest on Interstate 5.

Hundreds of mourners and protesters gathered in Seattle for a Saturday night vigil to remember Summer Taylor, 24, who succumbed to their injuries less than 24 hours after being hit. Diaz Love, 32, is still recovering from their extensive injuries as of this writing.

Friday, July 3, was the 19th straight night demonstrators had occupied the multi-lane freeway in the name of the Black Lives Matter movement and against police brutality. Protesters played music and danced while Love livestreamed the protest on their Facebook page under the title, “Black Femme March takes I-5,” as they had done previous nights.

Graphic social media video shows a white sedan driving at a high speed towards the roughly 50 protesters. Worried shouts of “Car! Car! Car!” are heard as the vehicle, a Jaguar, swerves to avoid two cars, including a conversion van, which had been parked sideways to protect protesters. The car, tires squealing, then veered into the protesters at a high rate of speed.

The force of the violent impact propelled Taylor and Love head over heels through the air. Kelete never stopped after the impact, instead he slowed down briefly before proceeding to drive for approximately two miles before he was blocked by a protester who used his own vehicle to box in Kelete before police arrived and arrested him.

Kelete, who is African American, is currently being held at the King County Jail on two counts of vehicular assault. A bond hearing is set for Monday morning; at

this time no clear motive has been determined by authorities. Police have stated that Kelete was not impaired, inquired about the health of those that he had struck and, according to police statements, “the driver was reserved and appeared sullen throughout his time in custody.”

In an interview with the *Seattle Times*, Aaron, who was protesting with Diaz and Love Saturday morning stated that it “didn’t seem like an accident at all. He didn’t hit his brakes, he didn’t stop.”

According to public records, Kelete attended Washington State University between 2011 and 2017 where he majored in business and commerce. Social media accounts show Kelete to be a typical college student who attended football games and drank with coeds at frat parties. A LinkedIn profile, allegedly belonging to Kelete claims that he worked at DoorDash, the food delivery service, as a sales manager for five months in 2015-16 and his language skills include Tigrinya, the native language of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Katelyn Hoberecht worked with Taylor at Urban Animal veterinary clinics and spoke to the *Seattle Times* about her close friend and coworker.

“Summer has been there since Day One standing up for Black lives. Staying out all day and night, while still working full time taking care of animals,” Hoberecht said. “Summer talked to me about the protests, and how incredible it was to be a part of something so huge. A part of history.”

Last week, militarized Seattle police and FBI agents used the pretext of several recent shootings to clear out the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone. Similarly, Washington State Patrol is using this latest vehicle-ramming attack to shut down protests against police violence and criminalize free speech.

In a blunt statement Saturday, State Patrol Capt. Ron Mead blamed the protesters for being struck and threatened to arrest them if they tried to march on the roadways. “Blocking a freeway is a crime and no longer are we going to enable that criminal conduct to continue,” said Mead who also announced police would no longer be closing roads to protect protesters. “We are not going to be allowing protesters to access the freeway unimpeded, and there are consequences for criminal conduct.”

Police made no note of the fact that Kelete had to drive the wrong way on the Stewart Street off-ramp to enter the interstate since it had been partially shut down by police for nearly an hour in anticipation of the nightly protests. Nor did they elaborate on why Kelete purposefully avoided a multiple vehicle blockade while driving at a high rate of speed before plowing into the crowd of roughly 50 protesters who had been playing loud music, singing and carrying signs.

Following the announced death of Taylor, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan tweeted out her “thoughts” regarding Taylor and her family, while pledging to offer the Washington State Patrol “any city resources needed,” as they “thoroughly [investigate] the incident.”

While several questions remain unanswered regarding Saturday’s deadly vehicular assault, it is a fact that right-wing elements have been encouraged by the police and the media to use their vehicles as weapons against protesters, which have resulted in a sharp increase in vehicle assaults within the last month.

In January 2017, a video first published by the conservative news outlet the Daily Caller was then reposted on the Fox News website with the title, “Here’s a Reel of Cars Plowing Through Protesters Trying to Block the Road.” The author of the article then noted, “Study the technique; it may prove useful in the next four years.”

Comments posted underneath a Foxnews.com article indicate the environment that has been fostered by the media against protesters. One well-liked comment reads: “Well that’s one less antifa terrorist we have to worry about.” Another noted, “It’s a start. Keep running them over and they will give it up.”

Saturday morning’s horrific scene is at least the 51st vehicle-ramming episode since nationwide protests against police violence, triggered by the Memorial Day

murder of George Floyd, began six weeks ago, according to data compiled by Ari Weil, a terrorism researcher at the University of Chicago’s Chicago Project on Security and Threats.

Weil’s research, which only covers from May 27 thru June 17, notes that of the 50 incidents he recorded, five were perpetrated by police while 45 incidents were by civilians. According to Weil’s analysis and news reports, 18 of those incidents involved malice, while in the other 23 the motive remains unclear.

One of the five police-involved incidents documented by Weil includes a video showing New York officers ramming protesters with their cruisers in May. Despite the clear video evidence, less than two weeks ago New York police Commissioner Dermot Shea ruled that officers did not violate the department’s “use of force” policy when they used their 5,000-plus-pound sport utility vehicle to shove a barricade into protesters.

An attempted vehicle assault was foiled in Seattle on June 7, when Nikolas Fernandez, 31, attempted to drive his Honda Civic into a crowd of protesters. Dan Gregory, 27, is still recovering from a gunshot wound, inflicted by Fernandez after Gregory attempted to stop Fernandez from driving into the crowd.

Gregory was sitting on the curb eating a hot dog when he noticed the black car turn a corner and appeared to be headed for the protesters. Gregory, speaking to the *Seattle Times*, recalled “a feeling” he had, “he’s going to hurt somebody, he’s doing it on purpose.”

Gregory ran beside the car and reached in to grab the steering wheel to prevent Fernandez from driving into the crowd, as Gregory reached in Fernandez shot him in the shoulder with a Glock 26 pistol. After shooting Gregory, Fernandez exited the vehicle and attempted to escape into the crowd, while still brandishing his weapon. Fernandez has since been charged with first-degree assault.



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