

U.S. snowstorm strands drivers for more than 24 hours

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Vehicles are seen on an icy stretch of Interstate 95 closed as a storm blankets the US region in snow, near Fredericksburg, Virginia, US January 3, 2022. (Reurtes photo)

Washington, January 5 (RHC)-- The snow storm is over but the travel misery lingered as drivers on a major highway outside Washington reported Tuesday they were stuck in their cars in freezing weather for

24 hours or more.

As families tried to return home from the long New Year weekend, I-95 in Virginia was dangerously icy, gas tanks were running low and for hours there was no help in sight, drivers said. Aerial footage showed seemingly endless lines of cars and trucks, bumper to bumper, that were stranded overnight -- on a stretch of highway that is notorious for traffic jams even in good weather.

One of the frustrated travelers was a U.S. senator from Virginia, Tim Kaine, who got marooned driving in his state back to Washington as Interstate 95 clogged with snow and spun-out cars, and eventually shut down because of Monday's monster snowfall. Kaine said: "I started my normal 2 hour drive to DC at 1pm yesterday. 19 hours later, I'm still not near the Capitol," Kaine tweeted Tuesday morning. "Update: I've been on the road for 27 hours," he wrote later, adding in a subsequent tweet that he had finally reached the Capitol.

Jim DeFede, a Florida-based journalist with CBS, tweeted that he has been stranded for more than 20 hours. "I'm not sure but I think I now qualify for Virginia residency," he wrote.

In a separate live feed DeFede described the highway as an icy parking lot where nothing was moving, and said he had not seen a highway patrol car or tow truck in 12 hours or more. The temperature outside as he spoke was 19 degrees (minus 7 Celsius).

DeFede said he ran his engine for an hour or so to keep warm, then turned it off, then repeated this as the wait dragged on. "I've got a little over a half a tank of gas left and I have no idea when anyone is coming to get us out of here," he said.

Just after 6:00 pm Tuesday the Virginia department of transport tweeted that there were "no people stranded still on I-95." "Less than 20 vehicles left to be removed from the interstate before plow trains will come through to remove snow and ice from the travel lanes," the tweet said.

Monday's storm packed an unexpectedly fierce punch and appeared to have caught much of the capital region off guard, temporarily stranding U.S. President Joe Biden on Air Force One and dumping up to nine inches (23 centimeters) of snow on Washington -- and more in parts of Virginia.

It further snarled transport hit by flight cancellations due to bad weather and airline staffing woes caused by a record surge in Covid cases.

An Instagram user with the handle kyleoland said their family of four with two small children slept in their car, ran out of water and walked three miles (five kilometers) in the dead of night to the home of a good Samaritan. "The last 24 hours have been the longest of our lives," the post said.

Earlier, Virginia's department of transportation said it had never seen such a mess on I-95, although it gave no estimate of how many drivers were affected. "This is unprecedented, and we continue to steadily move stopped trucks to make progress toward restoring lanes," department engineer Marcie Parker said.

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