

Harrison Ford Crashes into Santa Monica Airport Issue



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People are often inclined to notice that something that has long needed fixing finally gets attention when either a celebrity or a person with other kinds of power is impacted by the issue. Even Dick Cheney softened in 2013 when his

daughters went public with a disagreement over gay marriage.

When married gay daughter Mary took her sister Liz to task for campaigning for office as against gay marriage, Cheney's bionic heart told him to go public with support for Mary. "I'm proud of her," Cheney told ABC News... then he wiped away a tear generated by an onion strategically planted in a shirt cuff.

You can well imagine that those who would like to shut down Santa Monica Airport thought they saw the issue moving toward resolution at light speed when movie star Harrison Ford (safely) crashed his plane shortly after take-off from the facility.

The LA Times wrote, "Shortly after the accident, anti-airport activists and Los Angeles City Councilman Mike Bonin, whose Westside district borders Santa Monica Airport (SMO), reiterated their positions that the embattled facility should be shut down."

People noted that Ford guided his vintage plane to an open spot on the Penmar Golf Course... avoiding homes all around the area.

In fact, I've personally done more damage to that fairway with my seven iron. But back to the note about avoiding homes.

This is the second time a plane has crashed at the Penmar Golf Course. NTSB records and news reporting show that there have been 42 Santa Monica-related crashes since 1982 within five miles of the airport. Eleven planes came down in Santa Monica and West Los Angeles neighborhoods. Read that "Where you live." If I had been in 42 crashes with my car since 1982, within five miles of your home, wouldn't there be some organized effort to confiscate my station wagon and get me a bicycle?

Obviously, Harrison Ford is a fan of flying and as a result he's been part of the effort to preserve the airport. The Times reports that Ford contributed almost \$26,000 to the campaign for a pro-airport ballot measure that was defeated in November's city election. Let me season that with the fact that I've personally enjoyed an open cockpit biplane ride taking off and landing at SMO. It was thrilling, and as proof I still have some insects in my teeth.

But the Ford crash simply puts forward an unpleasant question: What, exactly, are we waiting for?

You can find comments online where supporters of SMO will allege that people bought houses near the airport at reduced prices, and now they want to lose the airport. But if instead of

crashing planes from SMO the threat was something toxic oozing from a nearby chrome plating factory, would we still be debating shutting it down? You know what, forget chrome. Take that battery factory in Vernon that is finally getting shut down. But then that went 30 years, with the factory allegedly running on a temporary permit.

We are often thwarted by the sense that you can't turn back the hands of time. We endure all this traffic in Southern California because we simultaneously want to live here and get to the beach and have everybody else go away. But history is often the result of big decisions leading to big changes. (Feel free to quote me.) Now that somebody we all 'knew', albeit from the movies, has reminded us that over time life has sprouted up on all sides of SMO and you can do the math on number of planes using the facility and the probability of crashes... I'll ask again: Exactly what are we waiting for?

If we're waiting for this issue to suddenly and regrettably have a dark and tragic face to it, then we're not the same city that finds time to tussle over blue metal seats at bus stops. We're not the same city that so carefully considers its relationship to the homeless. We're not the same city that just sent snake handlers packing at the Pier and found ourselves suffering angst over the fate of ponies walking in a circle at the Farmer's Market. We're Vernon; kidding ourselves that a factory that processes the sinister crap inside batteries isn't impacting our neighbor's health. We're going to have city-wide WiFi access as a 'right', yet go on waiting for some next more horrible plane crash? I think I just heard Chewbacca roaring at that thought.

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