

Taking control of New York's taxis

The one-day strike by cabbies only illustrated their problematic behavior

Manhattan's most (in)famous attractions were closed for the day Wednesday. Perhaps more often associated with New York City than the Empire State Building or the "twin towers," cabs in Manhattan were out of business.

The high-speed taxi adventure, often a ride during which drivers use obscenities and mischievous fingers, came to a screeching halt two days ago. If New Yorkers heard a cabbie yelling, it was probably the driver's attempt to tell an unwilling pedestrian why there was a strike.

According to The Associated Press, an estimated 80 percent of New York City's taxi drivers staged a semi-formal, 24-hour boycott starting at 5 a.m., about two hours before Wednesday morning's commute. The strike was a protest against recent city proposals to tighten driving and hiring regulations.

The New York Taxi and Limousine Commission will formally vote on the issues May 28. But if residents themselves were to look at the proposals to actually see why taxi drivers are up in arms, the drivers' motivation behind the strike would seem more confusing than trying to hold a conversation with those same drivers.

What is arguably the simplest proposal, subjecting drivers to drug tests, is perfectly normal in a time when such tests have become standard for getting a job. But sure enough, that's on the list of taxi drivers' gripes. Also among drivers' complaints are proposals to ban smoking and do away with blaring music.

The funniest complaint, and the

one late-night talk-show hosts will love for the next few months, revolves around a proposal to fine cab drivers up to \$150 for ignoring or cursing at their customers.

Honestly, it is doubtful that Wednesday's strike will earn taxi drivers much support. The final proposal provides the strongest evidence for this: Who in their right mind would not support a proposal that tried to keep residents from being verbally abused and then forced to pay for the ride?

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani supports the proposals; they are part of his attempt to make New York City "friendlier" and more approachable. Of course, so was his idea of putting speed bumps on some of downtown Manhattan's most traveled streets. The difference with the taxi proposal, however, is that this one actually makes sense.

On a normal day, 7,000 cab trips are dispatched from LaGuardia airport, according to The Associated Press. If even 5 percent of those trips involved some sort of verbal bashing by a driver or passenger, 350 people would exit the taxi fuming.

The proposals have already upset at least 800 people at the Taxi Workers Alliance in New York, which organized the strike in an attempt to get the entire 12,000-strong force of taxi drivers to join in. The drivers who went on strike Wednesday want a hand in rule-making and a dose of re-

spect, according to Biju Mathew, a strike organizer quoted by The Associated Press.

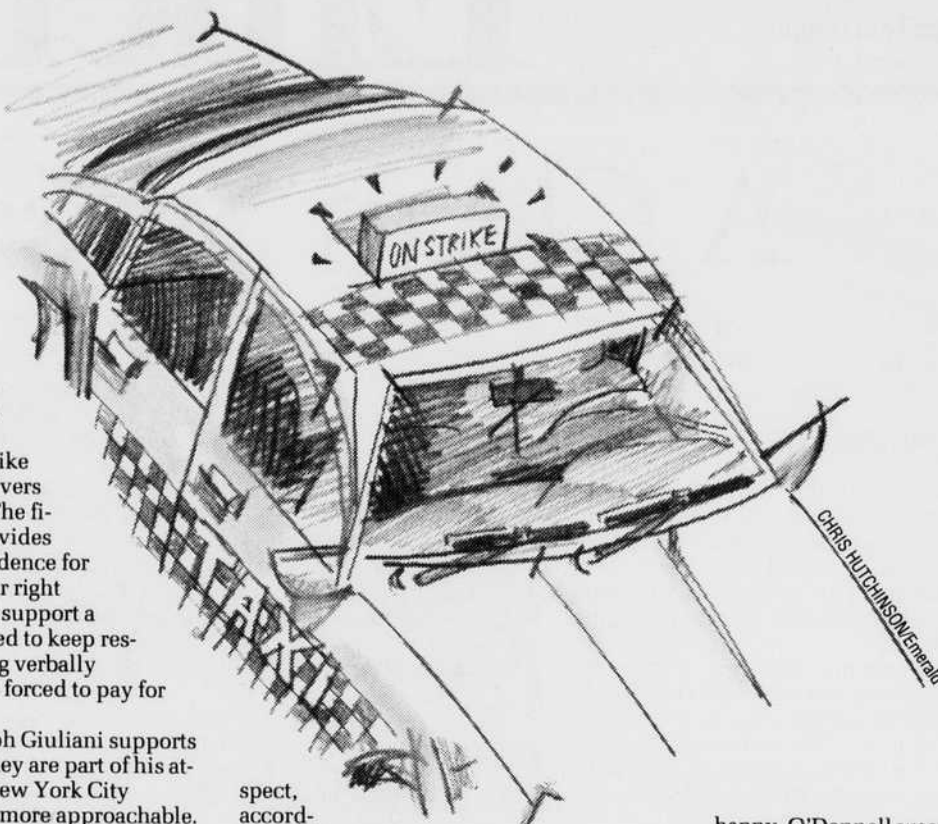
But respect is one thing this strike may have actually harmed. Late-night entertainers such as David Letterman play on the stereotypes of New York cab drivers on a regular basis, poking fun at typecast accents and clothing. Even Rosie O'Donnell, America's top contender for the title of "queen of afternoon talk shows," joined in the fun when she brought a local cab driver on her show.

The man spoke to the audience with a thick accent, telling the crowd that O'Donnell had given him a lifetime supply of "Juicy Fruit" gum, which he hands out to his passengers because it seems to make them

happy. O'Donnell was not making fun of the man, but I couldn't help but wonder whether the audience was laughing at the driver's generous habit or the driver himself.

The strike on Wednesday should have the same comical effect. New York residents will inevitably ask why cab drivers even bothered to strike. After all, the proposals are an attempt to make cabbies more considerate, not restrict their freedom. Drug tests and not cursing at customers are no-brainers for most people. I would think that people in the forefront of New York's public service industry would know that.

Jonas Allen is a columnist for the Emerald. His work appears on alternate Fridays. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.



OPINION



Jonas Allen

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Corporate education

Dave Frohnmayer in a recent Emerald article (ODE, May 7) fails to mention that the director of the Oregon Foundation, Jon Jaqua, was an instrumental actor in Oregon's fiscal crisis and the decline in state appropriations.

Jaqua, the former head of the state's Economic Development Department, "crafted" the semiconductor tax break program (HB 3686) and "pushed it through the Oregon Legislature" (Register-Guard, March 13, 1996; Business Journal, April 28, 1995). Jaqua was a major leader in Oregon's strategic investment program, which was "tailor made" for computer chip makers such as Intel. HB 3686 allows "counties to waive property taxes beyond the \$100 million in taxable property." Intel and Hyundai are two of the major semiconductor programs that are using Oregon's strategic investment program. Hyundai is using Oregon's enterprise zone program. As Bill Scott, the development department's director, pointed out, "Jaqua led state efforts to woo Hyundai and Intel."

Frohnmayer and Jaqua frequently argue that the University must turn to private funding because public funds are drying up. However, what they neglect to point out is that the decline in state appropriations is directly connected with corporate tax rates. After major property tax reductions favored by corporate interests, corpo-

rations only pay 65 cents for every \$1 households pay. Corporations received a \$100 million refund in taxes in 1998 and with the kicker law, the corporate income tax rate is expected to be only 3 percent of all state taxes collected. It is important to note that Jaqua was instrumental in the reduction of state revenues collected by corporations. This is a major reason why public funds are drying up.

What Frohnmayer also neglects to mention is the business partnership with the University is what the press now calls "strategic philanthropy." As a recent issue of Sales and Marketing Management points out, "under such labels as 'strategic philanthropy' companies are getting smarter about giving ... companies are trying to make a difference, especially in the bottom line" (March 1997). Two major laws, Small Business Patent Procedures (P.L. 96-517), which allow universities to sell patents derived from research to corporations, and the Tax Recovery Act (P.L. 97-34), an executive order that allows for increased tax deductions for any contribution made to a university, facilitated the intensity of strategic philanthropy. These business-university partnerships provide massive benefits in the form of technology transfers to corporations plus a tax subsidy for donations. Therefore, businesses can socialize their costs by having the public pay for the cost of research and development. Nike's return

for strategic philanthropy has been "sports marketing research." The next major technology transfers will be to the semiconductor industry. It should be noted that Jon Jaqua worked with the Capital Center, the Semiconductor Consortium and the Oregon Chapter of the American Electronics Association to integrate curriculum with the semiconductor industry and to connect the University with high-tech industries.

Julia Fox
Instructor, Sociology

OSPIRG disappointment

Reading the article on the University of Oregon's student vote was a great disappointment. I was not a direct participant with OSPIRG, but I served on the University's Student Senate from 1980-84. I didn't always agree with their decisions, but having so many wonderfully varied views is part of the great process.

OSPIRG's accountability is made with their accomplishments. Their goals, their success and their dedication express their "honesty." The issues over the years have been approached with sincere dedication to an open source of information and fair treatment not just for the student body but for the state.

I spent one term developing a campus energy-use study as an architecture student. I had the assistance of architecture

Professor John Reynolds and the resources of OSPIRG. The support and information provided was a great asset. I have continued to rely on that particular study's foundation in later efforts as an architect when I develop projects utilizing energy grants for more efficient designs.

The close vote and the low voter turnout indicate a strong need for reconsideration. OSPIRG is accountable through their history of open public debate on so many varied issues. Their honesty is in their track record of success.

Michael Prothe
Portland

Selfish generation

It is sad to see our University give up its part in developing leaders for the future. The dumping of OSPIRG by the students reflects a generation that seems unwilling to lead or be involved in correcting today's problems.

I can even see the response to this letter — none except from the people who are happy to see their money go for selfish needs.

At some point we all will suffer the consequence of our selfishness and unwillingness to deal with today's problems. Involvement is the key for a better society, and I can see this society failing quickly.

James Aiken
Salem