

... Portland looks at Uber driver standards

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policies on so-called Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft.

Uber, which three years ago entered Portland as a scofflaw and villain, played nice at the May 23 hearing.

"I acknowledge that we have made missteps here," Uber's new Northwest general manager Alejandro Chouza told City Council. "Now and in the future, we will conduct our business with integrity, humility and passion for improving the community."

Uber began operating in Portland in December 2014 in open violation of local taxi ordinances, and even deployed software called Greyball that effectively blocked City enforcement agents from using the Uber app to summon a car.

One of the three items City Council approved May 23 was an ordinance that, among other things, makes Greyball explicitly illegal. Another resolution directs the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) to study whether TNCs have contributed to greater traffic congestion in Portland.

But the resolution that got attention from labor leaders directs PBOT to develop a proposal for a new oversight body focused on "transparent collection and use of



"I'm a Portland State student, and I love this city. I started driving for Uber and Lyft in the fall of 2015. I've driven over 40,000 miles for them, given thousands of rides, and worked through snowstorms and holidays. [As drivers] we are exempt from federal labor laws, including minimum wage, workers' compensation, unemployment insurance and the right to collectively bargain. Our earnings are erratic and often fall below minimum wage after driver expenses. A few months after I started driving, Uber and Lyft cut rates with no warning. We have no guarantee of protections from future rate cuts, so at a moment's notice we could be earning even less. We have no recourse in the event of an unfair deactivation or other grievance we might have with the company."

— Uber driver Owen Christofferson, testifying to Portland City Council

data, accessibility, wages, public safety, safety and reliability for passengers, equalizing standards across the for-hire sector, and equitable dispute resolution." PBOT is supposed to work with

stakeholder groups and come back to City Council with such a proposal within six months.

The resolution also directs PBOT to study the issue of taxi and TNC insurance. When Port-

land City Council legalized TNC operations in 2015, it passed "separate but unequal" regulations imposing more stringent insurance and background check requirements on taxis than on TNCs.

Since then, TNC use in Portland has soared. PBOT officials told City Council that over 10,000 people are driving for Uber and/or Lyft in Portland, providing 300 to 700 rides per hour. That means TNC drivers may now outnumber taxi drivers by about 10 to 1.

At the hearing, Commissioner Fish asked Uber and Lyft representatives point blank if they support the idea of the new oversight body.

"We do support finding a way to accomplish the goals that you're looking to accomplish, so we will happily work with you to try to find an operational process, understanding what those motivations are," said Chouza, the Uber general manager.

"We are also open to having creative conversations on how to accomplish these," said Lyft public policy manager Rena Davis.

"That's a lot of words," Fish replied. "Some questions do lend themselves to yes or no."

Pressed further by Fish, Chouza said Uber is okay with the proposal, depending on details; Davis said Lyft would pre-

fer the status quo but would work with the City.

Judging by conversations the Oregon AFL-CIO has been having with Uber and Lyft drivers for the last 30 months, the status quo is not working for all.

"We have a TNC system in the City of Portland without checks and balances from the drivers' perspective, void of transparency, a system where workers' voices are not heard," AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain told City Council.

Chamberlain was one of a handful of people invited to speak about the issue before open public comment began. Another was Owen Christofferson, a PSU student who drives for both Uber and Lyft and supports an AFL-CIO-backed driver group, Transportation Fairness Portland.

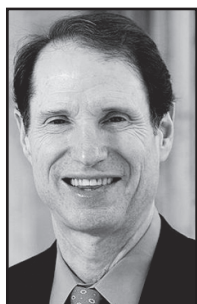
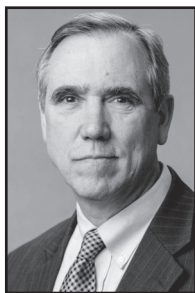
Christofferson said TNC drivers need an oversight body like City Council is proposing, because they're exempt from minimum wage, workers' compensation, unemployment insurance and the right to collectively bargain.

"A few months after I started driving, Uber and Lyft cut rates with no warning," Christofferson said. "We have no guarantee of protections from future rate cuts,

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"This bill has many positives, most notably a significant expansion of the VA caregivers program that has successfully helped many veterans stay in their homes while enabling their family members to provide the care that they need. Unfortunately, the positive aspects of this bill were paired with provisions that I simply could not support. The bill invests billions of dollars to support private health care for veterans, but doesn't put a single dollar into filling 30,000 vacancies in the VA health system. This bias for privatization is extremely troubling."

— Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR)



"The VA MISSION Act will provide more incentives and inducements to help attract medical providers to the VA and keep them there.... But I fear this bill will give broad authority to VA leadership to send more veterans out of the VA system. Given the relentless push by special interest groups to send an ever greater number of veterans into the private sector, I am concerned about the Trump administration giving into those folks and turning the VA over to ideologues or privatization partisans."

— Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR)

... Bill moves toward VA privatization

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ited to veterans who live more than 40 miles from any VA health facility, or who need procedures those facilities can't provide within 30 days. The VA Mission Act loosens those rules, so much that the Congressional Budget Office estimates that an additional 640,000 veterans a year will get VA-reimbursed medical care from private doctors.

The VA Mission Act does have elements that AFGE and the AFL-CIO support, including expansion of a program providing in-home care: Up to now in-home care has been available only to post 2001 veterans, but the VA Mission Act expands eligibility to include veterans of previous eras. The VA Mission Act also includes measures to address the personnel shortages that are fueling



"[The VA health system] is a national jewel, and we need to protect it," said longtime health care journalist Suzanne Gordon at a May 16 forum in Portland organized by AFGE. The event drew about 60 people, about half veterans, and about 10 employees of the Veterans Administration.

longer-than-optimal wait times, including recruitment, retention, and relocation bonuses, and a new loan repayment program for specialties where the VA is experiencing a shortage.

More than 9 million veterans depend on the VA health sys-

tem, which includes 150 hospitals, 819 clinics, and 300 mental health centers. All told, VA facilities see more than 230,000 patients a day. It's a population that is older, poorer and sicker

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