



# Puget Sound Taxi Driver FORE TIMES

June 2012

News for the Western Washington Taxi Cab Operator Association (WWTCA) - Teamsters Local 117

Teamsters Local 117: 14675 Interurban Ave. S, Suite 307 • Tukwila, WA 98168 (206) 441-4860 • www.teamsters117.org

# TAXI DRIVERS VOICE CONCERNS AT FORUM

*Over 200 taxi drivers meet with political candidates*



*Taxi drivers address their concerns to candidates at political forum at the Teamsters Building on May 24.*

Over 200 taxi drivers and members of Local 117 who support the drivers, gathered at the Teamsters Building in Tukwila on May 24 to voice serious concerns about their industry to a group of 10 political candidates and to ask for their support.

At the event, drivers talked about the rigged system of excessive fees that make it increasingly difficult for them to make ends meet and provide for their

families.

"Many public and private entities have their hands in the pockets of the taxi drivers. The result is that we are falling below the poverty line," said 18-year driver Paul Dhani.

## **EXCESSIVE FEES FOR TAXI DRIVERS**

Dhani said that drivers must pay \$15,000 just to be able to operate a cab at the airport, and he estimated that they pay an additional \$1000 a week to run their

cabs in the greater Seattle area.

## **LACK OF BASIC BENEFITS**

The lack of basic health care coverage was another topic discussed at the event. Under current law, taxi drivers are not eligible to receive benefits from dispatch companies.

"I'm old and I don't have insurance. If I get sick, I'm gone," said Michael Megenta, a taxi driver of nearly 19 years. Megenta reported that the majority of drivers do not have health insurance.

## **FOR HIRES & LIMOS TAKING BUSINESS**

One of the most pressing issues drivers face at the airport and in the city is the flat rate for hire cars and limousines.

Over that last few years, the number of these cars has grown significantly, and because the City, County and the Port have not aggressively enforced the rules, flat rate cars have often been acting like metered and regulated taxis. In fact, given the way they have painted their cars, it would be hard for a visitor to know the difference.

To make matters worse they have been soliciting fares at hotels and taxi zones. At the airport after midnight, they cruise and pick up fares after the inspectors have gone. Even limousine companies

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## POLITICAL FORUM

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have been actively soliciting passengers at the airport as they make their way down to the taxi stand.

For taxis that have their rates fixed by the meter, this creates an unfair competitive environment that has grown worse for metered taxis because of lax enforcement by the City, County and Port.

The candidates and officials at the meeting pledged to look into this issue and see what the role of the State might be in the event that the Port, County and City are unable to come up with a solution to this problem.

### TEAMSTERS SUPPORTING TAXIS

The forum was hosted by Teamsters Local 117, the union that has been working to improve conditions for taxi drivers.

"We will continue to give our full support to Puget Sound taxi drivers so that they can provide a decent life for themselves and their families," said Local 117 Secretary-Treasurer, Tracey A. Thompson, who moderated the event.

All ten candidates who attended the forum are currently pursuing positions in the Washington State Legislature:

- **Brett Phillips** 36th district
- **Bobby Virk**, 11th district
- **Dave Uptegrove**, 33th district
- **Tina Orwall**, 33th district
- **Rob Holland**, 11th district
- **Joe Fitzgibbon**, 34th district
- **Sahar Fathi**, 36th district
- **Rick Hoffman**, 30th district
- **Bob Hasegawa**, 11th district
- **Pat Sullivan**, 47th district

Candidates listened to the drivers' concerns, answered questions, and

## Western Washington Taxi Cab Operators Association

# Founding Meeting

Taxi drivers from across the Puget Sound region will meet on June 23 for an historic event. Hundreds of drivers from 4 companies - Farwest, Orange, Stita, and Yellow - will vote on the founding of a new association - the Western Washington Taxi Cab Operators Association. *Join us to build power in the taxi industry!*

## Saturday, June 23 at 5PM

### Teamsters - 14675 Interurban Ave. S., Tukwila

- *Historic vote to found Taxi Association!*
- *Meet Teamster taxi drivers from Canada!*
- *Build power to transform the taxi industry!*
- *Learn more about the Teamsters Union!*
- *Guest speakers!*



pledged to offer their support. In some cases, they planned follow-up meetings with the drivers.

Drivers said that they are eager to work with candidates to create a fair system that will give them the hope for a better future.

### FOUNDING MEETING - THE WWTCOA

The next big event for Seattle-area taxi drivers will be an industry-wide convention meeting on Saturday, June 23 to establish a new association for taxi drivers - the Western Washington Taxi

Cab Operators Association (WWTCOA).

The WWTCOA aims to educate the public about the essential service that taxi drivers provide to our communities, and it recognizes the drivers' role in supporting a tourist industry that brings millions of dollars into the greater-Seattle area each year.

*For more information, contact Thom McKibbin at 202-439-7125 or at [tmckibbin@teamster.org](mailto:tmckibbin@teamster.org). You can also contact Teamsters 117 at 206-441-4860 or at [leonard.smith@teamsters117.org](mailto:leonard.smith@teamsters117.org).*

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