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Will Uber Operate Accessible Vehicles?

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The New York City Council, with the support of Mayor Bill de Blasio, passed legislation, 39-6, which will cap Uber vehicles (albeit at 70,000) and other rideshare companies, as well, unless they add wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Uber opposed the legislation as did the other rideshare companies, but finally, politicians had the courage to stand up to the aggressive tactics employed by the app-based services. Uber bought one million dollars worth of television advertising time.

Its message was delivered by young black men who said they would not be able to get taxi service to or in their neighborhoods should Uber become unavailable.

The bloom is off Uber's rose, though, with all the publicity about abusive labor practices, sexism, corporate greed and taxi driver suicides.

Three years ago, the mayor attempted to cap Uber vehicles at 22,000. There were 13,500 yellow cabs at the time. The governor intervened on behalf of Uber and the City Council speaker at the time sided with the governor. Currently, approximately 1,000 of those cabs are off the road, many of them are accessible.

To operate a yellow cab, one must purchase a medallion at auction. Two years ago, the medallions sold for \$1,000,000, now they're worth less than \$300,000, so many owners have defaulted on payments and taken cars off the road.

New City Council Speaker Corey Johnson (D-Dist. 3) who introduced a bill several years ago to make all for-hire vehicles wheelchair accessible, threw his support behind a bill introduced by Councilmember Stephen Levin (D-Dist. 33), to freeze rideshare vehicle numbers unless they are adding accessible cars.

It shouldn't even be referred to as a "cap," but as an incentive to purchase accessible vehicles. Uber, which already has about 70 percent of the market share, is worth \$72 billion and offered New York City \$100 million to bail out yellows after driver suicides, can clearly capture more market share by purchasing accessible vehicles.

The new legislation, however, is a challenge to Uber's business model (drivers own their vehicles and the company opposes all forms of regulation, not just accessibility). Nevertheless, Uber plans on rolling out accessibility in 20 U.S. cities this year, not pursuant to any mandate and also not planned together with the disability community. Uber realizes it has to acknowledge the needs and rights of people with disabilities, but wants to do it, its way.

All over the world, in every city in which there is existing taxi service there is a struggle to deal with Uber's disruptive business practices. London banned Uber, after allowing them to operate, and now has withdrawn the ban. Many states, including New York, have ceded control of rideshares to the state.

In our state, except in NYC, Uber cannot be regulated by any entity except the state legislature and the governor. Many states have passed this type of legislation to help rideshares. New York City's successful opposition to the Uber juggernaut may inspire other locales, but if Albany, Buffalo, Syracuse, Nassau or Westchester want to regulate them and require access, they are too late.