

February 16, 2010

Channel 8 Continues to Misinform the Public Regarding the Practice of “Long Hauling” by Tying Two Unrelated Issues Together

Once again, Channel 8 reporter George Knapp has, in his February 15, 2010 story, inaccurately tied the long-hauling issue to terminated Taxicab Authority employee Scott Lewis as he has since his original story on the subject in July 2009. The issue of long-hauling and Lewis’s termination are not related.

Lewis Termination

Knapp reports Lewis was terminated because he was writing too many long-haul citations. Knapp reports, “Lewis says his troubles at work began when he tried to write tickets for long-hauling. He was told that if he wrote one more citation, he’d be fired.” This is not true.

FACT: Lewis filed a Whistleblower complaint against the Taxicab Authority on January 27. (Rev.2-17-10)

FACT: Lewis’s Whistleblower Complaint was dismissed with prejudice on July 22, 2009 by a state Hearing Officer (see [Decision and Order](#)).

FACT: Knapp and his producer have had a copy of this public document since August 27, 2009 ([see attached email](#)).

FACT: The Decision and Order states on page four the reasons that Lewis was terminated -- i.e. dishonesty, insubordination, disgraceful personal conduct which causes discredit to the agency, and misrepresentation of official capacity, among others. The Decision and Order establishes that Lewis did not offer any evidence to substantiate any of his allegations of “government corruption”, nor did he identify an event, individual, time, or place of alleged improper activity, or describe how any employee of the Taxicab Authority was involved in any improper act. Yet, despite these facts, Knapp persists in reporting the unsubstantiated allegations surrounding Lewis’s termination instead of the known facts. Facts he has had since at least August 27, 2009.

Long-Hauling

Knapp’s February 15, 2010, story continues to report erroneous information about the number of trips that begin at the airport, based on his July 2009 interview with Administrator Walker. In the July 6, 2009 interview, Administrator Walker unintentionally stated that 3,800 rides began at the airport.

FACT: On July 8, 2009, the TA sent Knapp [an email](#) correcting the error to show that 3,204,823 trips in fiscal year 2008 began at the airport.

Knapp correctly states the Taxicab Authority has had computer problems at the airport, but significantly overstates the need for MapQuest and, therefore, Internet access. As pointed out to Knapp in [an email dated February 5, 2010](#), employees can run a MapQuest at the TA office, if needed, before any court hearing.

The [February 5, 2010, email](#) also provided information about a significant change in long-haul citation procedures that make it easier for officers to write a long haul citation. Instead Knapp characterizes the change as “...T.A. employees were given new hoops to jump through.”

FACT: Not requiring a signed affidavit from a passenger who has not given the driver permission to take a longer route makes the citation process faster and more efficient for the officer.

Knapp cites “officers” stating that 80 percent of the long hauling citations have been tossed out or reduced by the Administrative Court Hearing Officer. On February 10, 2010, Knapp was provided with a breakdown for all 208 long haul citations written in 2009 (see attached email).

FACT: 52 citations were appealed -- 7 were dismissed -- 5 were found not guilty -- 196 resulted in fines.

Knapp correctly states that the number of citations in 2009 doubled over 2008, and that the number of long-haul complaints was cut in half over the same period. The TA considers the increase in citations to be significant progress, particularly in light of its diminishing resources due to the current budget conditions.

Knapp questions whether increasing fines for long-hauling will be effective since in his view there is no enforcement currently. FACT: The Taxicab Authority had 9 fewer officers during 2009 than it did in 2008 and continues to have limited resources, as do other law enforcement agencies. To maximize resources, severe penalties for regulatory violations became a viable option to deter potential violators. The proposed fine structure is also included in the [February 5, 2010](#) email that Knapp received.