

On Tuesday, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) ordered Uber and Lyft, nationally popular ride-sharing services, to cease-and-desist their operations in Pittsburgh. And while the companies have seven days to file a response to the ruling, with a final ruling coming thirty days from the original ruling date, there will be no service in the interim—meaning Pittsburghers will be without services they have sought with increased frequency, and found immensely valuable, since their arrival in the three rivers region.

The PUC's ruling, like so many regulatory decisions, is couched in concern for the "public welfare" but make no mistake—not only are Pittsburgh's citizens decidedly worse off, but the regulated industry (in this case, taxicab companies) ends up capturing and controlling its oversight commission to better itself by restricting entry, decreasing service and increasing profits.

The outcomes of this particular instance of regulatory protection are plain enough to any Pittsburgh resident who has sought a ride from our own little OPEC. Taxi riders, at best, endure filthy vehicles and extensive wait times in the hope that their driver—operating purely in the public interest, of course—actually fulfills their end of the deal. After all, regulatory protection and rigid pricing schemes lead to the economic outcome of persistent shortages of available cabs. It's akin to severely restricting the number of meals served within the city limits—with diners begrudgingly accepting gruel since the alternative is nothing at all. Competition drives companies to serve its potential customers in ever-better ways; regulatory protection staves off this incentive to improve at the expense of consumers that would otherwise be receiving more for their dollar.

Do not let the guise of "public safety" lull you into a sense of obligation to the entrenched taxicab industry; the rapid success of Uber and Lyft speak volumes about the taxicab services provided in the Steel City. After all, if the public interest is in fact of primary concern, why does the taxicab industry need protection? Do restaurants serving the public interest by delivering delicious food need protection? If public interest is actually being met, what leg to Uber and Lyft have to stand on?

The myth that industries, absent government oversight, persist in undirected chaos must end. The question is not whether regulation does or does not exist—the question is *who* will do the regulating. Despite its persistent efforts, the State is *not* the world's largest regulator—that title lies with consumers. Consumers regulate industries into providing goods people want. Consumers regulate industries into providing valuable service. Consumers regulate industries into focusing on causes near and dear to their heart. Short of satisfying consumers, companies are wont to be regulated the way of Montgomery Ward. Though the meaning is easily double, there exists no such thing as an unregulated industry.

Should you feel that our protected taxicab service provides unwavering rides independent of destination—that is, it exists purely as a public service and not as a means of increasing profits through regulatory protection—then I offer the

following experiment that any of you can perform. The next time that you need a ride, call our trusty taxicab companies and request two rides from two separate phones: One for one mile and one for fifty miles., both from the same location. I'd love to see which taxicab—operating purely in the public interest, of course—happens to arrive first.

Should our public servants be gracious enough to act in a manner befitting of our well-being and reinstate Uber and Lyft, I would recommend against trying such an act with Pittsburghers' preferred ride service—that is, unless you and your partner prefer to ride in two separate cars.