

California Senate offers 24-hour rides for drunken members

The Associated Press

California senators too drunk to drive can turn to a 24-hour ride service funded by taxpayers, a local newspaper reports.

State records show that the California Senate hired in February two part-time employees whose duties include "ground transportation for Senate members." The employees are paid \$2,532 per month, the Sacramento Bee reported (<http://bit.ly/1PTPRBj>) Friday.

The service comes after high-profile arrests of lawmakers on suspicion of drunken driving. Four lawmakers in the last five years have been accused of drunk driving, including three on streets around the Capitol.

The office of Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de León declined to discuss the details or rationale of the program.

"We're not going to provide comment, because it's a security issue," spokesman Anthony Reyes said.

The California Assembly also offers transportation services late at night, but not overnight.

One man who turned down the job told the newspaper that Senate officials approached him about working overnight to drive senators home upon request. One legislative chief of staff confirmed that the service is intended to prevent drunk driving by legislators.

Members have been given small plastic cards with the number for "Sacramento 24 hr transportation." The cards feature a "California State Senate" banner across the top as well as a phone number for the chamber's chief sergeant-at-arms, to be used in an emergency.

Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, said the rides are reflective of the Legislature's sense of entitlement.

"They get all these perks," he said. "Perhaps at the end of session, when things run late, there could be some temporary allocation made so legislators can get to the airport. But on an ongoing basis, this makes no sense."