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LA mayor backs truckies battling Toll

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A female truck driver sacked by Australian transport giant Toll Group in Los Angeles after making an "emergency" toilet stop at a McDonald's restaurant has delivered an emotional address to a high-powered group of US politicians and union officials.

Speaking on stage at the Good Jobs, Green Jobs National Conference on Thursday, Xiomara Perez said her experience at Toll's LA port facility was "horrendous", with drivers left to use "filthy portable toilets and no running water to drink or wash our hands".

Perez, a mother of three, has been a vocal leader in a bid by Toll drivers to unionise in LA. She told the audience, that included LA Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and US union boss James P. Hoffa, Toll used the McDonald's stop as an act of retaliation for her union push.

"My personal experience at Toll was horrendous," Ms Perez told the 200 or so crowd at the Westin Bonaventure hotel in downtown LA.

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"Last Friday I was fired for making an emergency stop to use the restroom. This is nothing short of retaliation."

Toll rejected this. The Melbourne-headquartered company said when Ms Perez stopped at the McDonald's she abandoned her fully-loaded truck on the side of a four-lane highway and in a no parking zone. Ms Perez had also lied and failed to

notify appropriate staff of the stop, Toll said.

Mayor Villaraigosa vowed to support the drivers.

“We are going to look for every way we can to make sure that independent truckers who are mis-classified, who are really employees in every respect of the word, that they get their justice,” Mr Villaraigosa told the audience.

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Australia’s Transport Workers Union national secretary Tony Sheldon said Toll had hired union busters to intimidate and thwart the LA truck drivers’ attempt to unionise.

Mr Sheldon said he believed Toll was using LA as a test and would attempt to use the methods in Australia.

“That’s not the Australian way a company is supposed to operate anywhere in the world,” Mr Sheldon, who will address the Good Jobs, Green Jobs conference later today, said. “It’s not the way they are expected operate in Australia and we are going to hold Toll to account.”

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