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Mayor Bob Foster Breaks with Big-City Mayors Pushing for Clean Truck Plan at Ports Nationally, Puts LA on the Hook to Pay For and Implement World's Most Progressive Diesel-Emissions Reduction Plan

LOS ANGELES, Oct. 20 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- A sustainable trucking fleet and long-term clean air gains supported by local environmentalists, community groups, harbor residents and workers could be jeopardized thanks to a settlement between the Port of Long Beach and the American Trucking Association announced late yesterday.

Mayor Bob Foster's willingness to sacrifice big-rig emissions reductions to curry favor with port customers comes one day after New York and Newark's Mayors Bloomberg and Booker joined Los Angeles and Oakland Mayors Villaraigosa and Dellums in calling on Congress to help protect the more successful and sustainable LA Clean Truck Program as the green-growth model to replicate at ports nationwide.

"The Port of Long Beach violated the public trust and sold out the citizens of Long Beach by approving a worthless settlement agreement with the American Trucking Association in their lawsuit against the Los Angeles ports' clean trucks programs," said David Pettit, a senior attorney of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). The director of the Southern California Clean Air Program of the 1.2 million-member environmental action organization added: "Rather than clean up the trucks that serve its port, Long Beach ran away from a fight with ATA -- an organization that has opposed clean air regulation locally and nationally -- and is content to sit on the sidelines while the Port of Los Angeles pays to clean up the trucks that serve both ports."

The settlement creates an "industry honor system" at the Port of Long Beach: Trucking companies who once had to meet concession requirements now can merely sign a piece of paper indicating that they haul cargo in EPA-compliant trucks. Evidence shows that those firms are forcing already low-paid contract drivers to foot the bill for the new trucks and maintenance through exploitive schemes that the Long Beach Press-Telegram recently reported "have trimmed driver incomes to new lows."

"They are giving a dirty bunch of industry bullies a free pass to port property if they claim 'Voila! We're clean,'" said frustrated Long Beach resident Bernice Banares, who teaches high school in what is locally referred to as the "diesel-death" zone. "Instead of siding with the industry polluters that sued him, Mayor Foster needs to be standing up for the workers behind the wheel and mothers of children with asthma like me."

In contrast, the LA Clean Truck Program uses a concession agreement to monitor and enforce emission standards. It transfers the responsibility for reducing air pollution from workers who can only afford to own and operate old, dirty rigs to trucking companies that legitimately employ their drivers and invest in and maintain clean, green trucks. In exchange, the firms are awarded powerful financial incentives to make environmental compliance economically advantageous, and access to the terminal gates.

Companies large and small alike have participated since its inception Oct. 1, 2008. But then the American Trucking Association sued both ports to help its members evade responsibility for cleaner commerce. They argue that an arcane 20th century statute preempts critical components of both the LA Clean Truck Program and the weaker, now-settled Long Beach version.

The Beltway-based industry lobby that also vigorously opposes federal climate change legislation obtained a temporary injunction against key provisions on appeal, threatening the long-term sustainability and nearly guaranteeing over 5,500 clean new trucks that the Port of Los Angeles has put on the road today will become dirty again in a few years.

That's because Long Beach drivers like Rafael Rivera, who was profiled in the Press-Telegram, recently went home with a \$138 check after a week of hauling and can't afford maintenance. "Between payments for the new truck, insurance, fuel, taxes and the lack of work, I'm barely making it.... I'm working 18 hours a day, six days a week, and I still can't afford my bills. I don't know what's going to happen."

In response, a growing movement of big city mayors, port authorities, and elected leaders at all levels are pushing Congress to change federal law to remove any doubt that local officials have the legal authority to address the market failures that have spiked public health and poverty statistics to crisis proportions and have earned America's seaports the notorious reputation as the place "where old trucks go to die."

The call is also supported by a nationwide alliance of over 100 organizations known as the Coalition for Clean & Safe Ports on the West Coast, and the Coalition for Healthy Ports on the Eastern Seaboard. The direct link between pollution and poverty at our ports has united groups as diverse as the NRDC, the Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma, the Teamsters, the American Lung Association of California, the Church Council of Greater Seattle, the Sierra Club, For a Better Bronx, and GreenFaith.

In addition to the mayors in California, New York and New Jersey, the LA Clean Truck Program has received public endorsements from then-Senator Barack Obama, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, California Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, 31 House California Democrats; Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-NJ); Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ); and New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine.

The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey and the Port of Oakland have also joined the Port of Los Angeles to educate Congress about the tools they need to meet and sustain federal clean-air standards.

The Coalition for Clean & Safe Ports is a partnership of environmental, public health, community, labor and faith organizations that promote sustainable economic development at West Coast ports. We are working to make the port trucking system a less polluting, more competitive generator of good quality jobs for harbor-area residents. The Coalition for Healthy Ports is the sister alliance working to create cleaner, greener ports in New York and New Jersey. We are over 100 organizations strong nationwide.

SOURCE Coalition for Clean & Safe Ports

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