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Where was Port Commissioner Tarleton when the Sierra Club was fighting to clean up this nation's ports?

[Seattle, WA] – In her election campaign against progressive champion Noel Frame, Port Commissioner Tarleton recently and publicly attacked her fellow commissioners and a local activist for their leadership on an issue of national importance to the Sierra Club – minimizing diesel pollution from port trucking. This is astonishing behavior for someone wishing to work with legislators in Olympia representing the progressive citizens of Seattle. But as a port commissioner who stood aside while polluters derailed key federal legislation needed by ports around the nation, and as a candidate who has accepted maximum donations from some of those same polluters, it may make sense.

Seaports, with both ships and trucks, are major sources of air and water pollution in their cities. For years, Sierra Club volunteers have been working on this issue, with a broad and diverse coalition including environmentalists, truck drivers, labor unions, neighborhood activists, and elected officials working together to build a port trucking system that works for the economy, companies, workers, and the environment. Starting in Los Angeles in 1999, this coalition moved from an antagonistic system where the drivers of trucks dedicated for port operations had to pay for the ownership, maintenance, and all environmental and safety upgrades for these diesel vehicles to one where these trucks, which are one of the worst sources of pollution from ports, were treated as port equipment, with the fleet maintained and upgraded by the port.

The goal was for the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to benefit from the same efficiencies as any other large company does with their equipment management, and in 2008, an economic study by Beacon Economics found that:

Over the long term, the [Los Angeles Clean Trucks Program] is a very effective means of reducing emissions from port drayage. It is more effective than the alternatives, such as a port-subsidized emission standard, in that it also has positive efficiency properties. That is, along with mandating cleaner trucks, the CTP will generate incentives that permit these cleaner trucks to be used more efficiently. Although the implementation of this program brings with it additional costs that have the potential to increase drayage rates, the results presented in this report indicate that there may well be accompanying cost savings with the potential to fully offset the increase in costs.

The cost savings of the Clean Trucks Program results from the new employment relationship and the obligation of the Licensed Motor Carriers to take ownership or control of the trucks. This relationship strengthens the vested interest of motor carriers in the efficient use of both drivers and trucks. The competitive nature of the current industry is such that the investment in infrastructure necessary to raise efficiency does not pay off. Under the CTP, the benefits will accrue directly to the LMC, rather than be shared with the truckers, making these investments more likely. Further, the consolidation of the industry will increase the pressure on terminal operators to invest in efficiency-enhancing equipment at the ports.

If a policy is implemented that merely mandates cleaner trucks, but does not tie the truck and driver more closely to the motor carrier, these efficiency gains will be left on the table.

<https://beaconecon.com/dmdocuments/Clean-Trucks-Program.pdf>

Concurrently, the Port of Seattle's Clean Air Program was about to adopt exactly what this economic study rejects: mandating cleaner trucks without changing the way the Seattle trucks are owned and operated. The reason frequently given by Port of Seattle representatives was the Los Angeles plan was being sued by the shipping and trucking companies enriched by the old polluting regime. Commissioner Tarleton relied on this in her email attacking local activist Heather Weiner last week: "The courts and Congress have rejected this model because of our federal laws that prohibit it." The Port of Seattle's plan has lower emissions standards than those in California and New York, and relied on bringing in trucks being retired in Los Angeles.

Tarleton fails to mention that in 2010, there was pending federal legislation to close the loophole blocking the port cleanup plans in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland, New Jersey, and Seattle. Under a frightening provision of federal law, ports may be blocked from enacting health, environmental, or safety standards on trucks. To fix this, Congressman Nadler introduced the **Clean Ports Act**:

The bill, which has 57 original co-sponsors, would amend the Federal Motor Carrier Act to allow ports to enact and enforce clean truck programs and implement environmental programs above the current federal requirements. This change to federal law would confirm that port cities like Los Angeles, New York, Newark, Oakland and Seattle have the authority to set the standards needed to replace diesel trucks with clean diesel and alternative energy vehicles in order to reduce pollution in a manner that has negligible effect on consumer prices, lowers public health costs for taxpayers, and does not unfairly burden the workers who haul cargo to and from U.S. seaports.

The Clean Ports Act would improve the quality of air for the estimated 87 million Americans who live and work in port regions, as diesel soot from dirty trucks greatly increases rates of asthma, cancer and heart disease in those areas, creating a growing national public health crisis.

(<https://nadler.house.gov/press-release/nadler-introduces-clean-ports-act-allow-ports-enforce-clean-truck-programs>)

This would not have mandated any actions by any port authority, and was a common-sense measure giving ports across the country the tools needed to improve air quality. The Sierra Club, National Resource Defense Council, and many other environmental groups lobbied for it nationwide.

Rather than support this legislation, the Port of Seattle attacked it. Port CEO Tay Yoshitani lobbied congress against this bill, lobbied against the Port of Seattle having the ability to raise environmental standards for the trucks polluting South Seattle neighborhoods (see <http://slog.thestranger.com/slog/archives/2010/01/27/port-of-seattle-ceo-strives-to-block-port-reform-contd>).

In December 2010, Commissioner Tarleton refused to vote on a resolution with Commissioners Creighton and Holland to repudiate the Port CEO's lobbying and have the Port of Seattle support of the Clean Ports act, effectively killing that resolution. In the end, thanks in large part to this disunion across the West Coast ports, the Clean Ports Act died, port cleanup around the country remains stalled, and the Port of Seattle still has lower air quality standards than those in the ports of Vancouver BC, Los Angeles, Oakland, New York and New Jersey.

Rather than attack her colleagues on the Port Commission who have been championing the environment, we invite Commissioner Tarleton to explain why, on a national priority Sierra Club issue to improve air quality across the country, she stood with and accepts donations from companies profiting from pollution.