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"Where there is no vision the people will perish..." Proverbs 29:18

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Commission May Ask Congress for Local Port Regulation

By Judith Scherr

If the Port of Oakland's going to get tough on truckers who pollute and support independent truckers making minimum wage, it will likely take an act of Congress.

That's what Port Commission President Victor Uno and a coalition of environmental, health and labor groups are seeking.

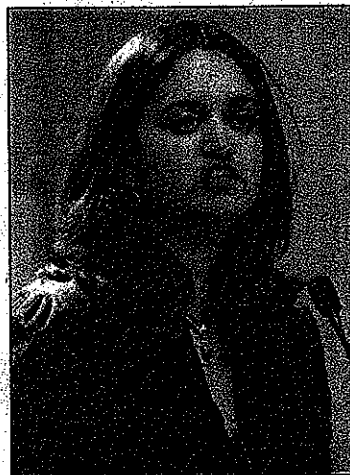
At the commission's July 7 meeting, Uno directed staff to write a resolution calling on Congress to pass legislation permitting regulation by individual ports of trucking companies operating there.

Ports then would be able to require companies to uphold environmental standards and to pay living wages.

"What we've been asking the Port of Oakland for almost three years is to pass a comprehensive truck plan to set standards for the trucking industry. Those standards would include that the trucking industries hire drivers as employees," said Aditi Vaidya, port program director at the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE), speaking before the commission meeting.

EBASE is part of the Coalition for Clean & Safe Ports.

In addition to giving ports



Aditi Vaidya

power over environmental standards and working conditions, the coalition wants the trucking companies "to hire

a certain percentage of their drivers from the local community where unemployment rates are as high as 16 percent," Vaidya said.

On June 16, Oakland Port commissioners raised the bar for truck emission standards to conform to new state laws: beginning January 1, 2010, trucks built before 1993 and newer trucks without soot filters won't be allowed to enter the port. This is excellent news for those concerned with high rates of asthma among West Oakland residents.

Independent truckers, however, cannot afford to retrofit their trucks.

Ray Gibson is a 26-year driver. Speaking before the meeting, he said: "It is hard being an independent at the port. Right now I'm facing \$10,000 worth of engine and clutch repairs, not including trying to get the retrofit [to meet new environmental standards]. I'm looking at about 40 grand coming out of my pocket."

Gibson wants reduced truck emissions, but said he can't participate as an independent. He needs to be a trucking company employee. The proposed federal legislation would allow the port to require companies to employ independent truckers.

Trucking companies don't want these new mandates.

According to Andy Garcia, board chair and executive vice president of the trucking company, GSC Logistics, "There's over 250 job offers for drivers in companies to work as a proprietary driver. If they don't take those offers, it's because they don't want to. There are job offers for those who feel they are being exploited, without having to mandate ... everyone having to treat everyone as employee drivers. The teamsters don't want owner-operators to exist on this planet. They simply want more teamster-drivers and that's not a fair option..."