

We Can Have Clean Air Without Punishing Consumers

By BOB SCOTT

If there's one thing about which everyone in Los Angeles can agree, it's that we all support clean air. Formerly the smog capital of the nation, we've come a long way in cleaning up the air we all breathe, and we need to take additional steps to continue in that direction.

However, a November ballot measure to increase oil taxes is the wrong way to accomplish this agreeable goal. The Valley Industry & Commerce Association opposes this ballot measure along with a coalition that includes the California Chamber of Commerce and the Automobile Club of Southern California.

At a time when gasoline prices already are high, this initiative would add billions more in taxes on oil production leading to higher gasoline prices. This tax will certainly lead to increases in travel costs for consumer goods, and will make it even more difficult for Californians in both public and private sectors — truckers, school bus operators, airlines, commuters and soccer moms.

That just doesn't make much sense.

Furthermore, because higher taxes would discourage in-state oil production, it would also increase our dependence on foreign oil.

Moreover, the measure would create a whole new bureaucracy with the power to spend unlimited tax dollars without accountability or results. This new state agency would be run by more than 50 political appointees outside the normal state budget review process and outside the normal checks and balances that govern other agencies.

VICA strongly believes that cleaner energy usage is the way of the future, but this initiative will merely siphon dollars out of consumers' pockets and reduce our ability to compete in the world market-

place. We must find positive incentives to decrease our dependence on foreign oil and clean up our air. VICA believes that our state legislators can accomplish these priorities without creating a punitive and regressive tax burden for California businesses and residents.

VICA is eager to participate in what will surely be a spirited debate on this important topic. Let's work together to clean up our air and cut fuel consumption without punishing California consumers in the process.

Bob Scott is chairman of the Valley Industry & Commerce Association, a business advocacy organization based in the San Fernando Valley.

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Container Tax Is Right Way to Pay For Port Upgrades

By TIM CARMICHAEL

A new, reliable and continuous funding stream is needed to upgrade security and keep the Los Angeles/Long Beach port complex a safe place to do business. These funds would protect neighboring San Pedro Bay communities from pollution and safeguard the thousands of employees who make their living at the harbor.

That's why I disagree with the op-ed from John McLaurin ("Container Tax Is the Wrong Way to Fund Infrastructure," July 31). McLaurin, who is president of the association that represents owners of marine terminals and vessels that operate in the Pacific, wrote that he opposes SB 760, which would create a modest fee on shipping containers at the ports.

But SB 760 invests in a strong economic future for California because its revenue stream will be divided equally into thirds for security enhancements, effective air pollution technologies and rail improvements to cut congestion.

The Los Angeles and Long Beach port complex is the busiest in the nation. As a gateway to international trade, much of it from Asia, the ports are a key economic driver in the Los Angeles region.

Yet for all this economic activity, the L.A./Long Beach port operations would screech to a grinding halt after one terrorist attack. Even the threat of a terrorism plot would strand ships at sea like so many passengers at the airport. Industry knows that such traffic jams cost millions in lost revenues, so it makes dollars and sense to start investing in prevention.

Millions of cargo containers move through U.S. ports, yet 98 percent are never inspected, and they remain a highly vulnerable target. Many national experts have testified that because airports are such a primary focus of post-9/11 security efforts, the ports have been overlooked and are now the weakest link in our country's homeland defense.

SB 760, State Sen. Alan Lowenthal's bill, will begin addressing the port's vulnerability with a funding stream created by collecting \$30 for every twenty-foot-equivalent shipping container processed at the ports. Lowenthal's plan will help equip the ports with the technology and staff needed to thwart terrorists, while making investments in air quality and infrastructure at the same time.

This plan would bring critical investment without more taxpayer debt.

Investments in cleaning up port operations and in rail infrastructure are both key elements of the funding proposal, and both are critical if the ports are going to accommodate a growing volume of goods from overseas. Projections show trade into our ports tripling by 2020.



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Price Tag: A new study estimates that a \$30 container fee would increase total ship voyage costs at L.A. and Long Beach by 1.5 percent to 2.5 percent on average.

Without addressing congestion and public health issues, port growth will become a political lightning rod. Businesses in Southern California that want a healthy port economy should demand a funding plan that secures, strengthens and cleans up our ports.

The shipping industry is battling to defeat Lowenthal's SB 760 because it can't widen its focus beyond short-term profit — with few of the fiscal responsibilities of doing business at our ports.

Yet the cost is minimal. A new study estimates a \$30 container fee would increase total ship voyage costs to L.A. and Long Beach by just 1.5 percent to 2.5 percent on average.

That translates to mere pennies on an imported DVD player. Hardly enough to stifle profits where the market is set to triple in volume.

SB 760 is a true port user fee, and attorneys for environmental groups are confident the bill will withstand a Constitutional legal challenge.

The shipping industry can bear a fair share of the cost to clean up its operations, secure our ports, and invest in infrastructure. But we can't live with inaction. The ports are already the largest source of diesel pollution in the South Coast Air Basin. State air board officials estimate that 2,400 Californians die prematurely each year due to the pollution from transporting

goods and cargo.

And that will lead to a public health bill that I'm sure the shipping industry won't want to foot: The state air board says health costs from these toxic emissions will reach \$200 billion in 15 years.

Just as we cannot let terrorism snarl traffic at the harbor, we can't let pollution cloud our

economic future. Let us invest now in cleaner, safer ports. Lowenthal's bill offers a fair and reasonable funding plan that protects future trade and business at the ports.

Tim Carmichael is president and chief executive officer at the Coalition for Clean Air, a non-profit advocacy group based in Los Angeles.

LETTERS

Port Problems

We read John McLaurin's "Container Tax Is the Wrong Way to Fund Infrastructure" (July 31) as we continue to watch asthma rates rise in port communities.

Mr. McLaurin represents a mostly unregulated shipping industry that uses our publicly owned ports and reaps millions in profits while residents suffer. His cadre of lawyers knows that the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are the largest fixed source of air pollution in the South Coast region. His opinion piece conveniently omits the fact that 2,400 Californians have their lives cut short each year from this deadly pollution, according to the California Air Resources Board. Thousands more — many of them asthma

victims — end up in hospital rooms each year. Outdoor air pollution is literally causing and exacerbating asthma of port communities.

He makes it clear the shipping industry doesn't want to own up to its responsibility to pay a mere \$30 on a container when they enter and use our public ports.

Well, who does Mr. McLaurin expect will pay for the \$200 billion health care bill (state air board stats) that will result from this pollution in the next 15 years?

The taxpayers? Sounds like he wants to ship the costs to us.

Elina Green
Project Manager
Long Beach Alliance for Children with
Asthma