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### **GUEST VIEWPOINT: Local impacts of coal exports unacceptable**

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**BY ALAN ZELENKA  
AND KITTY PIERCY**

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The Eugene City Council is ready to vote on a resolution that calls for an environmental impact study and health assessment of transporting coal, and opposes shipping 10 million tons of coal through our community to Coos Bay.

We're generally strong supporters of improved rail services in Oregon, but we're very concerned that coal exports would worsen climate change and undermine city policies. Relying on coal exports is a risky business strategy, and the local impacts are just unacceptable.

Five other coal port projects are proposed in the Northwest. Combined, they would ship 80 million to 150 million tons of coal per year through Northwest cities. This is an enormous campaign by big coal to gain access to lucrative Asian markets, and we could end up on the short end of the stick. Big coal is after big profits at our expense.

Burning this much coal would result in carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to those from all of the gasoline used each year in the entire Western U.S. Helping this happen would be inconsistent with the energy and climate policies of Eugene and the state of Oregon.

The single most important factor in determining whether we can prevent catastrophic global climate change is the direction taken by fast-growing Asian economies' energy infrastructure. Unless we are successful in shifting from fossil fuels to clean energy, we face dangerous climate disruption.

Some argue that Asians will get the coal regardless, so we shouldn't lose out on some of the profits — but there is an ethical question here. We are already starting to see the tremendous cost of climate change in the U.S. in droughts, floods, heat waves and rising sea levels. It's clear that a decision to expand coal use will make the problem worse, and we shouldn't be part of it.

Instead we should continue to blaze a trail toward a sustainable future with cost-effective clean renewable energy, clean energy efficiency, and clean transportation choices. Facilitating coal exports does exactly the opposite.

Recently a statistically valid poll on Eugeneans' attitudes about climate change showed that 77

percent thought that climate change was real and human-caused (Eugeneans get it!), 71 percent believe that the long-term impacts will be catastrophic, and 78 percent thought we need much stronger regulation of greenhouse gases. This resolution on coal trains moves us in the right direction.

The coal export business is notoriously risky. Historically, coal export markets are extremely volatile — among all commodities, the boom-and-bust cycle of coal is among the worst. We've gone down this path before and lost our shorts. The Port of Portland tried this in the 1980s and lost millions. Los Angeles lost in the 1990s. When the coal bubble bursts and the high price for coal in Asia drops, western U.S. exports dry up. Investing public money in this strategy is bad public policy.

Finally, the local effects of coal trains are just unacceptable. Coal dust from the trains will spill into communities all along the route — not to mention the catastrophic damage cause by coal train derailments (and there have been 12 already this year in the United States).

Currently the coal industry and the train industry are in a legal battle over who should pay the \$50 million to \$150 million per year to apply a surfactant to the coal trains to prevent coal from flying off the trains.

The issue is far from settled, and yet the coal dust keeps coming. No technology is currently available to cover the coal trains, because they haven't figured out how to prevent gases from building up and causing an explosion.

Coal dust and train diesel emissions have been linked to cancer, bronchitis, emphysema, black lung disease and birth defects. The coal trains go directly through neighborhoods with populations that already face adverse health impacts. Equally important is the fact that the emissions from burning coal in Asia end up here. Those emissions contain mercury and other toxic air pollution that ends up harming air, water, fish, wildlife and children in the Northwest.

We want to be very clear that we're in favor of jobs, the Coos Bay Rail Line and trains. We can think of nothing better than having wave energy buoys made in Eugene delivered to Coos Bay on this rail line. We support family wage jobs and prosperity not only here but in Coos Bay.

But this choice will make climate change dramatically worse, the strategy is risky, and the local environmental and health impacts are too high. We support the resolution.

Alan Zelenka represents Ward 3 on the Eugene City Council. Kitty Piercy is mayor of Eugene. They prepared this essay with assistance from Climate Solutions and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

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