

Five Letters to the Editor in response to McClure (plus 1)

March 16 <http://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/letterstoeditor/article/Letters-to-the-Editor-March-21-6924396.php>

Regarding “Coal is already part of bulk terminal plan” (Open Forum, March 14): Mark McClure is not doing the city of Oakland any favors by supporting the bulk export terminal at the Port of Oakland. He argues that the terminal should be built because the Port of Oakland approved it in 2012. He actually says that coal poses no health risks because the environmental impact statement in the Pacific Northwest confirmed that there are no health and safety impacts from the transport of coal by rail.

Does he not know where coal comes from? Does he dismiss the impact of coal on the lives of the people who mine it and the people who will breathe the air where it is burned? Is he blind to the abysmal cleanup record of coal companies after they have finished extracting what is economically profitable? Speaking of profitability, doesn't McClure realize that coal will be the first fossil fuel that will be phased out?

Anthony Somkin, Berkeley

March 16 <http://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/letterstoeditor/article/Letters-to-the-Editor-March-21-6924396.php>

The ubiquitous human capacity to ignore the threat of climate change is on full display in Mark McClure's “Coal is already part of bulk terminal plan.” Nowhere does he mention that coal, a dying industry in the U.S., is the fossil fuel responsible for the highest rate of carbon emissions. Scientists, the Paris Climate Agreement and the U.S. president all agree we must leave fossil fuels in the ground. A good place to start is to refuse to ship coal through Oakland. Private profit should not win out over the future and health of our human species.

Barbara Rhine, Oakland

March 17 <http://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/letterstoeditor/article/Letters-to-the-Editor-March-17-6894473.php>

Regarding “Coal is already part of bulk terminal plan” (Open Forum, March 14): Coal is shipped through Richmond, but it's a small fraction of the amount proposed for the Oakland terminal. Rail cars carrying coal come through Oakland, but very rarely, only when the Richmond terminal runs out of space or a dispatcher makes an error. The environmental lawsuit was withdrawn because of timing, not validity.

The city council did not withdraw a related agenda item in February because the concerns about coal transport won't stand up to legal or scientific scrutiny, but to consider less expensive alternatives. Rather than soundbites, concerns about coal comprise hundreds of pages of scientific evidence.

This is not a choice between jobs or health. There are many bulk products that could provide jobs, in some cases even more than coal. This is not a taking of vested rights but the exercise of a contractual clause embodying the city's right to protect the health and safety of its residents.

We need to convert existing infrastructure to sustainable energy sources, not cling to toxic coal.

Margaret Rossoff, Oakland

March 21 <http://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/letterstoeditor/article/Letters-to-the-Editor-March-21-6924396.php>

Regarding "Coal is already part of bulk terminal plan" (Open Forum, March 14): Mark McClure claims that, "Recent press has focused on port funding activity in the Utah Legislature. We have had nothing to do with that."

In April 2014, the Utah Permanent Community Fund Board, a special state agency that makes grants to rural Utah counties for sewers, fire stations and other municipal improvements, quietly approved an unusual \$53 million low-interest loan to Sevier, Carbon, Emery and Sanpete counties. In a presentation to the board, Jeffrey Holt and several commissioners representing the four counties said the funds would contribute to a \$200 million maritime terminal in Oakland that would export many different commodities. Appearing with Holt and county officials was Mark McClure, vice-president of California Capital Investment Group.

Utah SB246 would authorize \$53 million in public funds for investment in an expansion of Port of Oakland and is intended to allow Utah to have an export portal to its sizable coal market to buyers on the Pacific Rim. Environmental groups in both Utah and California have launched an aggressive campaign in opposition to the proposed Oakland Coal Terminal and the Utah legislative manipulation of the \$53 million dollar through SB246.

Additionally, in California, the call for divestment of funds from coal have come from the California Public Employees' Retirement System and the state's teachers retirement fund, and Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones has asked all insurance companies in California to voluntarily divest their funds in coal. Now, it's time for California Attorney General Kamala Harris to contact Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes to advise Utah Gov. Gary Herbert not to sign SB246.

Gene Hazzard, Oakland

March 21 <http://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/letterstoeditor/article/Letters-to-the-Editor-March-21-6924396.php>

Regarding "Coal is already part of bulk terminal plan" (Open Forum, March 14): The proposed coal export terminal at the Port of Oakland was portrayed as benign business-as-usual because coal is already part of the bulk terminal plan. But today's environmental news tells us otherwise.

As measured by global average temperature, last month was the warmest February on record, by a large margin. Climate observers know that business as usual in this context is very dangerous, for the effects of coal exports go far beyond local health concerns.

We now know something we were unsure of just a few years ago: That climate change due to pollution from combustion of fossil fuels threatens coastal cities and low-lying islands, and will modify weather conditions around the world at such a rate and to such an extent that adaptation may be impossible.

If we as a society learned anything during the climate negotiations in Paris in December, it is that facing down climate change to ensure a better future is everyone's responsibility. Contrary to the article's implication, opposition to the coal terminal is not a casual and vain gesture of political correctness. It is an attempt by conscientious citizens to prevent the city's participation in environmental crimes against humanity.

Allen Carroll, San Jose

March 15, Unpublished comments circulated internally to NCiO from undisclosed person:

McClure argues that "coal... travels by rail through Oakland." The man is too modest. Why the very first train that crossed the continent to Oakland about 150 years ago must have carried coal also. That is because coal is what the train engine burned as fuel in order to get here. Apparently he believes that everything was settled then and there and that nobody can do anything different today? Not so!

The Richmond coal terminal simply tops off the cargo ships that are too deep to completely load in Stockton. The Long Beach coal terminal is closed. But somehow Union Pacific temporarily storing coal cars on tracks in Oakland is supposed to be the same as (and justify) mile-long coal trains day-after-day for the next 66-years rumbling along 1,000 miles of track spewing coal dust into the air, water and land. The polite word for this is Preposterous.

Abe Lincoln talked about fooling people some of the time. This is NOT one of those times, not about coal, not here, not now.