



Keeping score on environmental justice leadership

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By Allen Hernandez

Concerns about diesel emissions and poor air quality often go unheard by local officials across California. This was the case last month when the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors [voted](#) to support a 344,000 square foot warehouse project to be built less than 70 feet from homes in unincorporated Bloomington. Supervisors demonstrated poor leadership throughout the process. Concerned neighbors were targeted with disparaging accusations from those claiming to be servants of the people.

Although we lost the vote, we were pleased to see two of our legislators come down from Sacramento to continue the fight here at home. Senator Connie Leyva and Assemblymember Eloise Reyes backed up their constituents with strong testimony against the industrialization of this residential neighborhood, proving they are ready stand up to greedy developers so we can act together to build a greener and healthier future.

In this year's edition of the California Environmental Justice Alliance's Environmental Justice Scorecard (an assessment of how legislators vote on environmental justice issues), Leyva and Reyes received high marks of 92 percent and 86 percent respectively. The Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice is proud to have their support on issues that impact low-income communities of color. However, we know that there's much more work to do.

The Inland Empire has some of the dirtiest air in the nation and suffers from a range of cumulative environmental and economic impacts that have ranked it among the worst in the state by the California EPA. We host over 520 million square feet of industrial real estate. With the rapid expansion of retailers like Amazon, which built a 1.1 million square foot facility in San Bernardino County in 2016, the threats to air quality and health continue to grow. Health impacts such as premature death, chronic bronchitis, and hospitalization are estimated to cost our region \$10.2 billion per year. This means that bad health, early death and poor quality of life are the fate of far too many of our neighbors and family.

Unlike Supervisor Josie Gonzales, who dismisses the community's concerns, Leyva and Reyes support our demands for clean air, quality jobs and sustainable development. Time and time again both leaders have demonstrated unwavering commitment to social and environmental justice by championing legislation such as AB 2447 and SB 1000 that subject development plans to community input.

Despite being vetoed by Gov. Brown, AB 2447, authored by Reyes, aimed to mandate developers of polluting projects to provide extensive notification and hold public meetings in affected communities. This would have assisted Bloomington residents in fighting unwanted warehouses in their neighborhoods.

SB 1000, authored by Leyva and signed into law in 2016, mandates cities to include environmental justice criteria in their general plans. In the past, municipalities have created these plans without taking into account the disproportionate impacts industrial development have on communities like Bloomington and San Bernardino.

Unfortunately, not all our current Assemblymembers are scoring high marks on environmental justice. While they take progressive positions on some issues, they need to step up their commitments if they expect to continue receiving community support. It could serve them well to learn a thing or two from these strong women.

We deserve representatives who fight for clean air, affordable housing, and good quality jobs. When we get these leaders, we need to celebrate and re-elect them. When we don't—we need to hold them accountable through dialogue and direct action. If they don't get the message, we must support the election of new representatives that understand the urgency of our situation.

Allen Hernandez is the Executive Director for the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice, a member organization of the California Environmental Justice Alliance. You can find the 2018 EJ scorecard at <http://www.caleja.org/scorecard2018>.