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BARRIO LOGAN | NEWS TICKER

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## What the emails tell us

### Did shipping companies push petition signers in Barrio Logan referendum?

*By Dorian Hargrove, April 3, 2014*

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Did signature gatherers hired by San Diego's shipping conglomerates purposely spread misinformation in order to collect enough signatures to overturn the Barrio Logan Community Plan Update?

Emails released in court from those in charge of the referendum drive show that may

have been the case. In the days before the deadline, petition drive managers were scrambling to try and correct the misstatements. Some threatened the signature gatherers to withhold payment if they continued to spread false information.

But the bigger problem, says a lawsuit later brought by the Environmental Health Coalition, is those false claims came from the top down, from shipping industry bigwigs and their lobbyist who relied on scare tactics in order to collect the 52,000 signatures needed to overturn city council's decision.

On Friday, April 4, a superior court judge will decide if their claims hold water and whether to invalidate the referendum drive.

The issue dates back to September 2013. After years of public meetings, city councilmembers voted to update the Barrio Logan Community Plan. The amendment called for more strict regulations and a better dividing line between industrial and residential areas.

Over the past several decades, Barrio Logan, one of San Diego's oldest neighborhoods turned into a land-use disaster. Auto paint shops butted up against one-hundred year old homes. Semi-trucks would rattle homes in residential areas during their journey from the port to I-5.

A buffer zone and more strict regulations, however, struck a chord with the maritime industry. Before councilmembers could return home from the vote, representatives from large shipping conglomerates were talking referendum. They hired local lobbying firm, [Southwest Strategies](#) which in turn hired National Petition Management to begin hunting down the 50,000 plus signatures needed to put the item on the June ballot.

Weeks later, [signature gatherers were posted outside big-box](#) retailers and grocery stores telling residents to sign the petition or be faced with a mass exodus from the maritime industry.

Among their selling points, gatherers said the Navy would likely set sail from San Diego as it had in Long Beach and San Francisco decades prior. Shipbuilders too would ship out in search for cheaper ports. In all they claimed, 46,000 jobs could be at jeopardy and \$14 billion in revenue could be flushed down the toilet.

Those claims were later questioned by several media outlets. The Navy never said it would leave San Diego. In fact, it didn't take a position at all. And, the exact financial impacts were unknown.

The extent to which the shipping association and their colleagues played in the referendum is now becoming clear, via emails sent by the shipping companies' petition firm.

"In light of the media coverage, and after reviewing the [Environmental Health Coalition] video of a signature gatherer, I'd like to send a memo today to all circulators that directs them to follow the script and not use inaccurate facts," wrote Southwest Strategies president Chris Wahl to the head of the petition drive Lee Albright from National Petition Management in an October 24 email.

"I'd like to have this in our files (and again get it out today) so if we are questioned again by the media we can at least say we've tried to nip this in the bud ASAP, and I would potentially use this to show the media we have taken action, but I want legal opinion too."

Not long after, Albright appears to become more concerned. He sent out an email to subcontractors warning them to stay on message.

"[National Petition Management] can not and will not tolerate these actions reorient your crews on the issue and talking points," wrote Albright. "Should this continue we will be forced to not purchase signatures gathered by those individuals violating this standard."

Just days before the petition drive deadline, Wahl and his colleague Jessica

Luternauer quickly got to work to correct the talking points.

"We do not plan to be proactive at this point because we're hopeful the issue has been addressed and we won't have to deal with it again in the media," Wahl wrote to an undisclosed recipient on October 25. "However, as you all know, the signature gatherers are independent contractors, so it's possible that [Environmental Health Coalition] will record someone again not using accurate facts."

Tomorrow at 11am in Department 70, Superior Court Judge Randa Trapp will decide whether to qualify the referendum, allowing the city to place the item on the June ballot.

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## COMMENTS



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**dwbat** *April 3, 2014 @ 4:06 p.m.*

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Obviously the petition drive managers were coaching the signature gathers to lie about "lost jobs" and the Navy leaving. Those standing outside got paid by the signature, so they were going to say whatever it took, to convince voters to sign. The whole campaign was corrupt from the get-go. I personally heard these lies in North Park.

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**Bob\_Hudson** *April 3, 2014 @ 4:28 p.m.*

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Gee, signature gathers misrepresenting the facts - I am shocked! I mean, if you can't trust the guy at the card table outside Walmart, who can you trust?

Oh wait, that's the entire basis of California's referendum system and the reason why state government is shackled by so many bad laws resulting from that system.

As the story points out, Southwest Strategies, the overseer of the drive, took seriously its responsibility to direct the signature gathering company to ensure its employees stuck with the facts.

It might be nice if a judge did decide that most adult voters who sign petitions had no idea what they are doing - then maybe the courts could do a retroactive review of the ignorance behind most past referendums and throw out some of the resulting laws.

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**nostalgic** *April 3, 2014 @ 8:05 p.m.*

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Why did these people sign these petitions? Did the city actually validate these signatures against voter records? The signature gatherer's must get paid per signature. This would incentivize them to be persuasive.

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**dwbat** *April 3, 2014 @ 9:37 p.m.*

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Signatures are validated by the County (not City) Registrar of Voters. I believe they select a certain sample of the petitions, and check those signatures. More may be checked depending on what they find. Yes, signature gatherers get paid by the signature, as I stated in my comment above.

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**CaptainObvious** *April 3, 2014 @ 9:48 p.m.*

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The yards in Washington will be happy to take the jobs from San Diegans. Regardless of how they play the game, people need the work.

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**jelula** *April 4, 2014 @ 8:40 a.m.*

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For those who haven't been paying attention, NO jobs will be lost and the Barrio Logan Community Plan that these companies are trying to kill has no authority on the water-side of Harbor Drive. In fact, the shipyard union workers who initially supported the referendums because they believed the lies & posters emphasizing the lies, changed their position to opposing the two referendums once they actually read the plan.

The Community Plan will not change any existing business that *are* within the boundaries addressed in the Plan.

What the Community Plan does do is limit expansion of businesses on the land side of Harbor Dr., in a fraction of the area governed by the Plan, without public hearings & a Conditional Use Permit. The intent is to protect residents & homeowners within Barrio Logan - again, in a fraction of the area within the Plan boundaries - from

expansion of or establishment of new manufacturing businesses that further contribute to the existing health impacts on those who live nearby.

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