

OPINION

EDITORIALS

LETTERS

Protecting us from Ebola

IN THEIR EARLY ATTEMPTS to prevent panic in the United States, government officials spoke too quickly and with too much assurance when they told Americans not to worry about the Ebola virus crossing the country's borders. Last month, President Obama announced that all the necessary steps had been taken "so that someone with the virus doesn't get on a plane for the United States." Had the public realized what those precautions consisted of — merely checking travelers' temperatures, even though infected people can remain without a fever for weeks, and asking them whether they had been in close contact with Ebola patients — many Americans probably would have disagreed with the president. It was only a matter of weeks before Obama's words proved inaccurate.

Nor were all U.S. medical facilities as prepared to recognize the signs of Ebola as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention believed they were. That was made evident after a Dallas hospital sent Liberian national Thomas Eric Duncan home with antibiotics, even though the hospital knew that he had recently arrived from Liberia. On Wednesday, Duncan died.

Preventing unnecessary anxiety is good, but not if it means failing to address valid concerns. Now the president and the CDC must consider not only which safety measures to invoke and when, but how to rebuild trust with the American public.

After Duncan's death, the government announced that in addition to the preflight screenings performed in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, travelers from those nations would be rescreened when they arrived

in the United States — at least in the five airports where 94% of them arrive. Temperatures will be taken and passengers questioned a second time about contacts with infected people. Of course, some might lie, as Duncan did, but there is less incentive to do that once they have arrived safely in the U.S.

To these measures, authorities should consider adding a waiting period of several hours in the airport before checking for fever, to be sure that it has not been masked with acetaminophen or another medication, and expanding the screening to arrivals anywhere in the nation. And they should ask for detailed information about where the travelers will be staying and give them a phone number to call immediately should they feel ill.

No one should pretend that this is a fail-safe arrangement. But so far, this country has experienced only one lapse, and so far, none of the people with whom Duncan was in contact have fallen ill. It's too early to think about more draconian measures, such as quarantines or travel bans from the high-risk countries. But officials should reassure the public that they are open to strengthening safety precautions should that become necessary.

The Obama administration is doing the most important thing to keep the American public safe: providing resources to quell the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. By saving lives abroad, the United States might be able to prevent dangerous destabilization of the nations involved, and keep the outbreak from growing out of control so that there is no way to contain it within national or continental borders.

25 unpaid minutes of waiting

IMAGINE YOU'VE finished your shift, left your workstation, and as you exit the building you have to wait an additional 20 or 25 minutes to clear a security checkpoint set up by your employer to ensure that you aren't stealing anything. Should you be paid for that time as part of your workday?

Integrity Staffing Solutions, a contracting company that provided warehouse workers to Amazon.com, says no. But some former Integrity employees in Nevada disagree, and the U.S. Supreme Court on Wednesday heard oral arguments in the case.

The issue goes back to the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act and the Portal-to-Portal Act of 1947, which together established rules about what is considered work time. Subsequent court decisions have held that walking from one's car to one's work site, for instance, is not considered part of the compensable workday.

contaminate at the end of the shift should be covered.

The question in the Integrity case is whether waiting in line for an antitheat body search, at the insistence of the employer and for the employer's benefit, fits under that "integral and indispensable" definition. We think it does. Secretaries and other Amazon workers were not subjected to the search, just those who worked in the warehouse. By making it part of a warehouse worker's daily job requirement, the company deemed it indispensable.

Of course, Integrity could have made this a moot point if it had hired enough screeners to handle the end-of-shift traffic in a reasonable amount of time. Screening itself takes just a minute or two, but the delays were caused by the employer's refusal to properly staff the screening kiosks, saving itself money while taking up to 25 minutes a day of its workers' time.



SARAH HUXHOLD is a server at Milo & Olive, which adds a healthcare surcharge to bills.

Fee's hard to swallow

Re "One more thing on diners' plates — healthcare fee," Oct. 7

I don't believe restaurant owners who insist they are not making a political statement when they place a 3% surcharge for employee healthcare on customers' bills. One reason is that the actual cost of healthcare bears no logical relationship to the amount of food and drink a customer consumes.

Further, note the contrast with the lack of itemization of other costs of doing business. Why doesn't the bill reflect the cost of payroll taxes, property taxes or lease payments, business taxes and health inspection fees? Where is the itemization of wages, utilities, uniforms, laundry, amortization of equipment? Why is only the cost of healthcare brought to the customer's attention?

When costs increase, businesses normally raise their prices to compensate. A price increase of 3% usually passes without creating a stir. So yes, the specific surcharge for employee healthcare is plainly a political protest, no matter what the restaurant owner claims.

ELEANOR EGAN
Costa Mesa

I'm sorry to see the odious healthcare surcharge has made its way to Los Angeles.

I have been mad for a while about this surcharge that many San Francisco restaurants have. Employee benefits are a cost of doing business and should be built into the prices of items sold, not sneakily tacked on to the bill after the fact.

Only surcharges that apply in special situations are appropriate; those that apply to all bills should be made illegal in that their purpose is to hide the higher cost from the consumer.

MARC SCHOENFELD
Oakland

fighters, would it be able to stand against the 2nd Marine Division? Against a U.S. Army tank battalion with the awesome Abrams tank?

Not at all. Islamic State fighters would just melt in with the local populace, and we would be mired in a senseless and never-ending police action — again.

Why is the brain trust so eager to send our men and women off to right a wrong that we cannot right? This is a fight we cannot win, so let the locals fight it out or succumb to their fate. Let the Kurds, the Iraqis, the Syrians fight for their country, their families, their freedom.

When did we become a nation of such panic?

STEPHEN BATTWIN

Dodger Dogs to workers from downtown L.A. We can eat and look out over the whole city.

PAULA PARR
Santa Clarita

Let the people's will prevail

Re "Gay marriage gets huge boost from high court," Oct. 7

In 2000, the state of California adopted Proposition 22, which forbade the licensing of same-sex marriages. In 2008, the California Supreme Court ruled that law unconstitutional.

In response, Proposition 8, a constitutional amendment against the redefining of marriage, was placed on that year's November ballot. It received more than 52% of the vote.

Although upheld by the state Supreme Court, federal District Judge Vaughn Walker overturned Proposition 8 on Aug. 4, 2010. More than 7 million voters were effectively disenfranchised. This is what is meant by the term "judicial activism."

The way things are trending, eventually same-sex marriage would probably have been approved by voters, a far better way to go about this. What a tragedy to see 7 million votes trashed by an over-zealous judiciary.

Now, how sad it is to see the U.S. Supreme Court fail to uphold the will of the people in other states.

NATHAN POST
Santa Barbara

Keep the helipad requirement

Re "Playing with fire," Opinion, Oct. 7

Kudos to Assistant L.A. Fire Department Chief Patrick Butler for expressing his insightful thoughts on high-rise building safety. We tend to get complacent when there are long time spans between tragedies.

I watched in horror the live coverage of the First Interstate Bank Building fire in 1988. At the time I