

SUNDAY OPINION

EDITORIALS

LETTERS

More art for L.A.'s streets

THE CITY OF Los Angeles decided more than two decades ago that commercial development takes a toll on the visual landscape of the city. To mitigate that, the city began charging developers an Arts Development Fee — 1% of the value of their construction project or a per-square-foot fee, whichever was lower. In the years since then, millions of dollars have been put into a fund for public art that has financed murals, sculptures, and other projects.

But in 2007, the city attorney concluded that the art must be placed within one block of the development that financed it, to satisfy a state law requiring a "reasonable relationship" between the project paying the fee and the art. An audit earlier this year found that officials at the Department of Cultural Affairs were so hamstrung by that restriction that millions of dollars in the fund were going unspent. More than \$1 million was in danger of "expiring" and being returned to developers.

On Wednesday, the City Council took steps to fix the problem, passing new guidelines — with the legal blessing of a new city attorney — that lifted the one-block restriction and also allowed fees from more than one development to be combined to finance a bigger, better arts project. The guidelines also allow the fund to pay for arts performances, art classes and other cultural services in addition to traditional works of art.

It's good that the city is fixing this valu-

able but dysfunctional program. And it is true that the one-block restriction was too onerous. The audit looked at other local cities with arts development fees and none of them has such a restriction.

But the city should be careful. It argues that development anywhere in L.A. affects the city as a whole, and therefore that a new art project anywhere will serve as mitigation. But that's a bit glib. In practice, the city should work hard to keep the art funded by the program in the neighborhood of the development that paid for it. When the city combines fees from several projects, it should try to do so within a neighborhood or City Council district.

The city has said that City Council members will be consulted in decisions about where the new art should be located. Fine, but it's important that the final artistic decisions be made not by politicians but by the panel of experts appointed by the Department of Cultural Affairs.

And the new flexibility the city has to pay for festivals, performances and art classes from the fund should be used sparingly. While such programs are valuable, they're temporal. Public art remains for decades, mitigating the physical density and other negative effects of a commercial project.

These are all challenging issues for the city — but, hopefully, freed of unnecessary restrictions, officials will be creative when it comes to choosing and placing art in the city.

Rules on profiling fall short

ATTY. GEN. Eric H. Holder Jr. released new guidelines last week aimed at limiting profiling by federal law-enforcement officers. Though he should be commended for tackling the issue, the new guidelines leave much to be desired.

Their goal is to restrain the odious practice of profiling — in which law enforcement targets individuals based on their appearance or affiliation rather than their behavior — and to broaden restrictions on profiling beyond the existing categories of race and ethnicity to include gender and gender identity, national origin and sexual orientation. It would have been nice if Holder had explained why such additions were necessary — has there been an unrecognized problem with law enforcement targeting women, for example? Still, it is reasonable to conclude that using ancestry or a physical characteristic as an indicator of suspicious behavior is "unfair, promote[s] mistrust of law enforcement, and perpetuate[s] negative and harmful stereotypes."

The Justice Department's reach in this area, unfortunately, is limited. The guidelines apply only to federal law enforcement officials and not to local police departments like those at the center of recent profiling controversies, unless they're serving on joint federal task forces.

Most troubling about the new guidelines is the carve out for federal agents charged with enforcing immigration laws within 100

miles of the border, and for Transportation Security Administration agents at airports and other transportation hubs. In the general proscriptions, federal agents may use only characteristics of the defined categories in tandem with trustworthy information. For instance, if a witness describes a suspect as a 30-year-old Latino driving a blue car, federal agents can stop and question people fitting that description without being guilty of profiling.

But border agents and those of the TSA will retain flexibility in singling out individuals for closer inspection. For example, border agents will still be able to stop an L.A.-born Latino driving within 100 miles of a border based on his physical appearance, civil liberties experts say. FBI agents also can continue to zero in on communities based on demographics rather than evidence of wrongdoing, a galling overreach that has stirred resentment in Muslim communities.

These exceptions to the otherwise sensible rules do not further the aims that Holder seeks. Although it makes sense for TSA agents to look closely at, say, Yemeni-passport holders if there is a credible terrorism threat from a Yemen-based organization, that does not justify treating all Arabs with greater suspicion. And there is no justification for allowing the government to detain, even briefly, a U.S. citizen simply because of his or her Latino heritage.

Holder was on the right track, but he could have, and should have, done more.

Helping Mexican workers

RECAUSE OF AN INVESTIGATIVE SERIES in The Times, American consumers are more aware that a "Product of Mexico" label on their tomatoes or

ingly, usually including a black, white and green logo with the words "Fair Trade Certified." But some stores have only a few such products; they would stock more if consum-

Fallout from hacking

Re "Troubles piling up for Sony executive," Dec. 12

The troubling part of this entire incident is not that Amy Pascal made comments in a private email exchange with another entertainment executive that some people consider racially insensitive; the

troubling part is that all of this uproar is over a private conversation she had. How many of those who are up in arms over Pascal's comments in her email would still be so offended if they were held accountable for their own personal conversations? I am sure that if many people's Internet browser histories were revealed or if their deleted emails were to surface, there would be less finger pointing.

How people think or feel in private should not matter as much as how they behave and treat others in public.

JIM DRABOS
La Mirada

An Obamacare voice of reason

Re "Gruber was wrong," Opinion, Dec. 10

Let's get real about what MIT economist Jonathan Gruber said about the Affordable Care Act. It was not politically correct, but it was true.

He suggested that the American public might be stupid because people would have objected if financial charges under Obamacare were called "taxes" rather than some other name.

The fact is that Republicans act as though taxes — the lifeblood of a free and democratic nation — were original sin. This demagoguery, whether due to ignorance or political disingenuousness, has caused millions of Americans to view all "taxes" as some sort of government criminality rather than the price of a civilized society.

Gruber merely noted the obvious — that the word "taxes" has become a third rail in politics.

ELIOT SAMULON
Los Angeles

Reading op-ed article author Theda Skocpol's premise that the remarks by Gruber were wrong, I get the sense that of those involved in developing the Affordable Care Act, Gruber was the only one who was candid and authentic.

Furthermore, she says that the law was thoroughly vetted, understood and supported by policymakers. Really?

In addition, Skocpol states, "The taxes and subsidies that helped fund the implementation of



AFP/Getty Images
SONY Pictures executive Amy Pascal has apologized for some emails released.

amend a law that harms the ability of banks of all sizes to serve their customers. The majority of banks using swaps, including community banks, do so to hedge or mitigate risk from their ordinary business activities, including lending.

Hedging and mitigating risk are not only good business practices, they are also important tools that banks use to help borrowing customers hedge their own business risks.

RODNEY BROWN
Sacramento

The writer is president and chief executive of the California Bankers Assn.

It appears that our House has made a down payment on our next Wall Street bank bailout. The thin control enacted to prevent a bailout repeat is being removed in the Omnibus funding bill to satisfy major banks to the detriment of all taxpayers who are just now recovering from the worst recession since the Great Depression.

Will we never learn? Banks are too big to fail, but not too big to take our money. Did nobody listen to Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.)?

GEORGE GIACOPPE
Riverside

Does Lazarus believe that soda is the sole vehicle for sugar consumption? There is no basis for calling for this tax unless you also are in favor of taxing all sugar-containing foods. It's hypocritical otherwise.

I have a feeling this is more about smacking down a product that the elite doesn't consume while leaving "good" uses of sugar in artisan ice cream and food truck cupcakes alone.

MARC SCHOENFELD
Oakland

Re "The troubling militarization of local police," Editorial, Dec. 8

Did The Times not learn anything from the North Hollywood bank

A reboot of the "protect and serve" mind-set is the most important strategy required to effectively address the steady increase of armed over-reaction and consequent public outrage. Hopefully, it will help to steer the national conversation away from the trees (the endless rehash of the chain of events resulting in each unfortunate incident) and back to the forest, promoting the much-needed cultural shift.

This ridiculous procurement of armored attack and defense weaponry by local governments only serves to reinforce a fundamental economic principle: Supply creates its own demand.

R. C. PRICE
San Clemente

Am I the only person who has wondered why the military, with a huge annual budget, has grenade launchers, high-powered rifles, mine-resistant vehicles and fast patrol craft to give away? Are office supplies and night-vision goggles so fragile that they deteriorate and must be donated before they waste away?

This seems like wastefulness on a grand scale.

JEAN KOCH
Los Angeles

Why target just sugary sodas?

Re "No sugarcoating it: We need a national soda tax," Column, Dec. 9

David Lazarus makes valid points on taxing sugary soda drinks. But should sodas with artificial sweeteners be taxed as well?

It's important that they be included because the latest studies show that not only are they ridiculously unhealthy for many reasons, these so-called diet drinks actually are responsible for weight gain. Also, the sweetener aspartame has been shown to raise, not lower, blood sugar levels in diabetes-prone mice.

BONNIE SANDERS
Malibu

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