

*Re: "A police state on skid row," March 12*

Ramona Ripston is my colleague on the board of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA). She and I are united in our frustration and disgust at how few resources are available to address the serious and widespread tragedy that is homelessness throughout Los Angeles. But I respectfully disagree with Ms. Ripston that the LAPD has turned Skid Row into a "police state." Despite what the ACLU of Southern California argues, the real threat to life and liberty on Skid Row is not the LAPD, it's heroin and cocaine.

Until recently, entire sidewalks were covered from gutters to doorways with people injecting themselves with drugs day and night; bodies in full overdose seizures; acts of prostitution in full view of passing motorists and pedestrians; violent transient-on-transient attacks; communicable diseases from people eating, vomiting, defecating and urinating in the same place. The "devil drugs" drive the crime in Skid Row, and this community has paid a terrible price to stay high.

Mayor Villaraigosa, the LAPD and City Attorney Delgadillo courageously said "enough." Fifty specially trained police officers were dispatched here in September, and the results are nothing short of remarkable. Here, for example, is what you won't hear from the ACLU:

- Last year, the Central City East Association's security dispatch center received an average of 532 calls a month for open-air drug activity. Last month, we received 383 calls.
- Instead of an average 2100 calls a month involving persons sick, mentally ill or unable to care for themselves, last month we received 729.

These statistics are still unacceptable, but we are on the right track attributable directly to the LAPD's special enforcement. I challenge the ACLU of Southern California to compare their ability to save lives on Skid Row with the LAPD's.

This community deserves to have laws enforced in the same fashion as the rest of the City. Should the ACLU prevail in their effort to place special limits on how police officers protect and serve Skid Row, their attorneys will celebrate victory for a night; the drug dealers and criminal predators will celebrate every night.