

# VIEWPOINTS

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# Why arts matter in our schools

By JOE LANDON  
*Special to The Bee*

Barack Obama's presidency has been punctuated by numerous "teaching moments" in which an incident related to social injustice triggered a more thoughtful response to the underlying issues and lifted our collective awareness.

Recently, the president inadvertently created the opportunity for yet another teaching moment, with an off-the-cuff remark throwing "art history majors" under the bus while making the case for technical training as a path to an honorable career.



Joe Landon

He distanced himself from the remark in a handwritten apology, stating that "art history was one of my favorite subjects in high school, and it has helped me take in a great deal of joy in my life that I might otherwise have missed."

As the leader of a statewide arts education advocacy organization, with a daughter who happens to be an art history major in college, I confess that the president's remark hit a nerve. And so I ask, "Where is the 'teaching' in this moment?"

The reality is that Obama is not alone in revealing an attitude that marginalizes the significance of the arts when compared to "more serious" priorities. In recent years, as school funding in California has been drastically reduced, that attitude meant that arts education programs were often the first to be cut.

Access to arts education has been spotty. Where parents and communities could afford arts programs, those services limped along. In higher poverty areas where those resources didn't exist, programs disappeared. Unequal access has become the new normal of arts education.

What we have wrought is not a pretty sight. Merrill Goldberg, who chairs the visual and performing arts department at California State University, San Marcos, is responsible for preparing the next generation of California's teachers.

Yet she describes students who have a hard time identifying musical instruments, who don't know what a collage is and who have never had the opportunity to pick up a paintbrush. A generation of stu-



Barrie Maguire NewsArt

dents has missed out on the arts.

Why does this matter? California has a dropout rate of more than 40 percent, suggesting that too many students find no meaningful connection to their education.

At the same time, our state's economy relies on creative industries; they account for 8 percent of the state's GDP and for one in seven jobs in Southern California.

According to Sarah Murr, a former global citizenship community investor for The Boeing Company, "The challenge is that we have a shortage of people with the creative skills for the jobs that are needed in an increasingly dynamic and competitive marketplace."

We now have an opportunity to bring arts education back into our schools in a significant way. After years of focus on standardized tests and a narrowing of the curriculum under No Child Left Behind, the "local control funding formula" sets new goals for local districts that pri-

oritize student engagement, parent involvement, school climate, student achievement, a broad course of study – all things that the arts are known to contribute to.

Research documents the impact arts education can have on student learning, achievements and careers, including higher attendance rates; increased parent and community involvement; higher test scores and achievement in literacy, math skills and English Language Arts especially for English-language learners and low-income students. Art also develops skills such as creativity, critical thinking and collaboration.

In the coming months, as school boards seek input and develop their local control and accountability plans, local advocates have an opportunity to provide a teaching moment about the benefits of arts education in their district.

The California Alliance for Arts Education has created a toolkit to help local advocates be at the table for these conversations. Visit our website, [www.artsed411.org](http://www.artsed411.org), to learn more about the value of arts.

As Goldberg put it, "Every child deserves the best education possible and every parent, no matter what their background and context, wants the very best for her or his children."

"As we begin to uncover the consequences of the last 10 to 15 years of the widening education gap, I hope we begin to bank on students' abilities and potential by investing in arts learning and professional development, and this go around: truly not leave any child behind."

*Joe Landon is executive director of the California Alliance for Arts Education.*

# Gun law costs us consumer safety

By LAWRENCE KEANE  
*Special to The Bee*

A new California law is preventing consumers from being able to buy the best, ever more reliable models of pistols available, unless the manufacturer microstamps the make, model and serial number in two locations on the gun. In theory, the information would be imprinted on a cartridge casing when the gun is fired. New and improved models not equipped to microstamp are now considered "unsafe" under California law.

But, as several independent, peer-reviewed studies have shown, this nascent technology is flawed. It is incapable of reliably, consistently and legibly imprinting the required identifying information in two locations on an expended cartridge casing. Even the patent holder in a 2012 study he co-authored acknowledged the problems with this technology and called for further study rather than mandating its use. A National Academy of Science review, forensic firearms examiners and a UC Davis study reached similar conclusions. Because of the technology's inherent limitations, no manufacturer can comply with this new law.



Lawrence Keane

What the Legislature actually did was ban the innovation and stop the continuous improvement of today's manufacturing processes that would otherwise enhance firearms safety and other functionality.

Compounding the problem is the state attorney general's overreaching definition of what constitutes a "new model," thus triggering the microstamping requirement. According to the attorney general, the slightest modification or design enhancement done as part of the normal manufacturing process for any product, such as changing the way a part is made or its dimensions to make it stronger and more durable, is a "new model," which would now require microstamping. As a result, pistol models deemed as "not unsafe" by California are rapidly falling off the approved-for-sale roster.

While it's true that firearms owners can be just as responsible with pistol models currently in the market, innovation and continuous improvement have always been an important driver for all manufacturers, including those that manufacture firearms and related accessories.

Notable manufacturers such as Smith & Wesson and Sturm, Ruger & Co., have announced they cannot bring their newest products into the California handgun market; and the ripple effect goes beyond those law-abiding citizens purchasing these pistols for home defense or sport shooting. The firearms industry provides nearly 25,000 jobs in California, paying an average of more than \$50,000 a year. The economic impact will extend further than jobs and consumer spending.

The firearms industry is responsible for more than \$3.6 billion in economic activity in California, generating more than \$251 million in state taxes, as well as an additional \$281 million in federal taxes.

Recently, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the trade association for firearms, ammunition, hunting and shooting sports industry, filed suit against the state of California. It is seeking to enjoin enforcement of this new law so law-abiding California citizens can purchase the latest pistols that are available to consumers in other states. Unless the court blocks enforcement of this ill-considered mandate, citizens in California will only be able to choose from a shrinking list of older models.

Is this California's idea of improving consumer safety?

*Lawrence Keane is senior vice president and assistant secretary and general counsel for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the trade association for the firearms industry.*

# Tax reform again loses out to petty politics

By DANA MILBANK  
*The Washington Post*

Dave Camp stood alone. The chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee had toiled for years to prepare the first rewrite of American tax laws in more than a quarter-century. Now in his last year with the gavel, he was finally ready to unveil his 1,000-page plan.

But when the earnest lawmaker announced his proposal at a news conference in a Capitol TV studio Wednesday, Camp had nobody at his side. Democrats had abandoned his effort last year. The Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, had pronounced Camp's proposal dead. And House Speaker John Boehner, asked about the details, responded: "Blah, blah, blah, blah." Asked a follow-up about the likelihood of a vote on the proposal, Boehner replied, "Ah, Jesus."

Even Jesus, it would seem, could not pass tax reform this year. Democrats and Republicans agree that such a rewrite is long overdue, but last week made it obvious: Congress may have the ways and the means to get it done, but it lacks the heart and the guts.

I pity Camp, a soft-spoken Michigan Republican who labored for this worthy cause even as he battled cancer. At Camp's news conference, the first questioner, The Associated Press' Stephen Ohlemacher, noted the McConnell and Boehner remarks and asked: "Do you feel like you're being undercut?"

"No, I don't," said Camp, who, if he had been undercut any deeper, wouldn't have been visible above the lectern.

The saddest part is it probably didn't have to be this way. There is bipartisan appetite for something very much like what Camp proposed – coupling lower tax rates with an end to tax

loopholes and giveaways to the well-connected, all without reducing the progressivity of the tax code. Unfortunately, the chairman, for all his admirable policy work, deserves some of the blame for the failure to make it happen by allowing politics to consume his committee and to dictate the timing of his tax plan.

At the start of 2013, Camp divided his committee into bipartisan working groups, and lawmakers discovered an encouraging amount of agreement on tax reform. Camp scheduled a series of town hall meetings for the summer with his Democratic counterpart in the Senate, Max Baucus.

But beginning in the spring, the IRS targeting flap exploded, followed by the trouble with the Obamacare rollout – and the agenda of the committee shifted dramatically. The Ways and Means hearing calendar since May tells the story:

Three on the IRS targeting, three on Obamacare, and one each on trade and multinational corporations. Subcommittees joined the rush to probe the administration. Lost, for the most part, was tax reform. Committee Republicans say this didn't slow the development of the bill (that was being done by different staff) but it embittered the Democratic minority.

In July, Democrats on the panel met with Camp and said they'd like to draft tax legislation with him. But they were told that any agreement could not include additional tax revenue and would have to include a top tax rate of 25 percent for individuals and corporations. Democrats walked. In hindsight, his insistence on the 25 percent rate was needless because the plan he eventually proposed includes a 35 percent "surcharge" rate.

Camp had planned to move the tax bill through his committee in the fall but again, politics intervened. This time, the problems with HealthCare.gov were causing trouble for Obama



J. Scott Applewhite The Associated Press

**Rep. Dave Camp**, R-Mich., has little support from his own party's leaders for his tax-reform plan.

and the Democrats, and Republican House leaders didn't want anything to distract from that story. Camp relented, Republicans exploited the Obamacare troubles, and hope for new tax laws died.

By the time Camp finally released his proposal, it was too late. House GOP leaders declined to endorse the plan, or to commit to a vote. "We are going to continue to have conversations," was all Boehner would promise. The speaker last year had reserved the title of "H.R. 1" for tax-reform legislation, but Camp's bill reportedly won't be granted that symbolic honor, and it's not even clear that his own committee will approve it.

The best Camp can hope for now is that he'll be granted a waiver to extend his chairmanship into next year, when the post-election atmosphere might be friendlier to his proposal. Or perhaps he'll watch as his successor, likely either Paul Ryan or Kevin Brady, picks up the pieces.

Tax reform might have failed over the last year even if Camp hadn't allowed his beloved proposal to be subordinated to his colleagues' desires to embarrass the Obama administration. But at least it would have had a chance.

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