Dear Los Angeles Times,

I read, with great concern, Steve Lopez’s column published on May 29 about Measure EE. While it contained many mischaracterizations of me and the organization I lead, the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, I whole-heartedly agree with one of the column’s points: voters are weary of giving more money to a district with problems that never seem to get solved.

In the column, Mr. Beutner characterizes the Chamber’s position as one reflecting that of the skyscraper owner. But let’s be clear here about who and what the Chamber is about. More than 90 percent of L.A. Area Chamber’s members are small business owners – hard working people who’ve built their coffee shops, retail storefronts and catering businesses from the ground up. They are now being asked to “contribute” even more to a district that has shown no intentions of addressing the problems that brought us here, nor guarantees that any of the additional funding will ever see the inside of a classroom.

We, like many Times’ readers, want a strong public education system for our children. In fact, this Chamber has a long-standing history of supporting efforts to increase funding for schools, including our strong advocacy for Measures R, K, Y & Q, as well as Proposition BB – which raised a total of more than $20 billion for education-related efforts during the last 21 years. We’re not opposed to investing in our communities through increased taxes. Most recently we supported efforts to address homelessness, supportive housing and transportation issues with Measures H, HHH and M, all of which contained voter guarantees about how funds would be spent, as well as independent oversight. Measure EE does none of these things.

I am glad to see Mr. Caputo-Pearl and Mr. Beutner finally working together. Perhaps they need to reflect on their own behavior before casting aspersions at a well-established organization that has a lengthy record of supporting public education in general and LAUSD in specific. After all, it was Mr. Caputo-Pearl who, in his statements made during the recent teacher strike, said that LAUSD had “pots of money sitting around.” However, with the strike over and a tax measure proposed, these “pots of money” have vanished. Instead taxpayers, including teachers themselves, are being asked to make up the difference for the check Mr. Beutner wrote without adequate funds in the bank.

I’m proud to lead a business organization, one that remains dedicated to improving the quality of life for all Angelenos and has since its inception. So, while these two men would like to paint a picture of me as some uncaring billionaire, that’s not who I am. I am a woman of color (the first to lead this Chamber), a daughter of immigrants, a mother, a former small business owner and a life-long Angeleno. For these two men to assert that I don’t see the value in kids of poverty or kids of color is categorically untrue and insulting. I was one of those kids a few decades ago.
The fact is, the L.A. Area Chamber is committed to supporting future funding which assures a quality education for all of L.A.’s students. We just don’t agree that Mr. Beutner and Mr. Caputo-Pearl have come up with a reliable and fair means of doing so. And as much as they try, these “two strong-willed tough guys” will not bully me into staying quiet with their inaccurate, personal attacks.

Finally, in 2019, after all that we’ve learned in recent years, I would hope your columnists would veer away from phrasing like “climbing into bed with,” when referencing any woman and her professional work. These sexist kinds of comments are an affront to all women and beneath the dignity of news outlets like the *Los Angeles Times*.

Respectfully,

Maria S. Salinas
President & CEO
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce