

Don't push entertainment out of L.A. The city must do all it can -- including close freeways -- to keep film shoots in L.A., or studios will take their production elsewhere.

November 25, 2006

By Antonio R. Villaraigosa, ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA is the mayor of Los Angeles.

LOS ANGELES remains the entertainment capital of the world. But to keep it that way, we're going to need to roll out the red carpet to the film and TV industries to ensure that they continue shooting here.

At the moment, the entertainment industry employs more than 200,000 people in Los Angeles County with quality, middle-class jobs. Production activity contributes more than \$25 billion annually to our economy. An average scripted feature, television or commercial production has a direct economic impact of \$150,000 to \$250,000 every single day it shoots.

It would be a terrible mistake to take that business for granted. Today, only 11% of all feature films are being made in California, and we cannot afford to cede this integral industry to other cities, especially as competition grows more fierce.

I was particularly concerned about a recent editorial in this paper criticizing the lending of portions of the 105 Freeway and roads surrounding LAX to "Live Free or Die Hard," a high-profile, high-budget production filming in L.A. The editorial included the regrettable money line: "This is one scene we wouldn't have minded being shot in Canada."

Although some people may wish this shoot had been done elsewhere — and although our city may scarcely notice the effect of losing a single production — we will find ourselves standing on the curb, helplessly watching moving vans bound for Vancouver and New York City, if we allow this sentiment to direct city policy.

In 2005, 14 states passed new tax incentives or improved existing incentives for film productions. A growing number of cities and states are aggressively courting Hollywood's entertainment industry with various incentive packages. Those regions intend to develop infrastructures that will accommodate the film industry; there are troubling, long-term implications to that trend.

We are already seeing the effects. Feature film production in Los Angeles was down 5% in the third quarter compared to a year ago.

For my part, I will continue to be creative, entrepreneurial and aggressive in supporting film production in L.A. The City Council recently approved my plan to provide free filming on most city property, as the state already does.

I also supported AB 777, which would have provided a 12% refundable credit against income or sales tax for productions that schedule at least 75% of their shooting days in California. This legislation targeted the types of production leaving Los Angeles. We cannot stand idly by while other states enact incentives to lure jobs away from our city.

Let's send the message that we treasure our city's creative community. It's what makes Los Angeles unique. You can be sure that I will remain committed to retaining this iconic industry, vital to a vibrant Los Angeles economy and to our identity as a city.