

# OPINION

## South Gate coming back

**S**LOWLY but steadily, South Gate's efforts to rebuild its city government and seek justice after being devastated by political corruption are paying off.

The city is still grappling with a \$6 million deficit created by former Treasurer Albert Robles and his former allies on the City Council, who, federal prosecutors say, drained nearly \$12 million from South Gate coffers. Current council members say that layoffs of city staff members and cuts in services may still be inevitable.

Yet the city has enjoyed a string of recent legal and judicial victories worth celebrating.

In one of the biggest recent developments, South Gate won a \$2 million settlement from one of Los Angeles' biggest law firms, Sheppard, Mullin, Richter and Hampton, which had been accused of overbilling for services commissioned by Robles and his council allies. Two judges

ruled that the firm overbilled, charging as much as \$1 million for what one judge said ought to have been \$150,000 worth of legal services. Without admitting wrongdoing, the firm settled with South Gate last week.

The city has also brought lawsuits against other legal firms accused of overbilling. And the search for justice among Robles' associates is showing signs of strength. A federal grand jury has indicted one of Robles' key business allies, George Garrido, on fraud charges. Garrido is alleged to have acted as a middleman in a deal that involved payoffs from a trash company. An official from the trash company has already been indicted on bribery charges.

Other cities have been stung by political corruption in recent years, but few have been victimized as badly as South Gate. It's going to take a while to recover, but the city's current leadership is moving steadily in the right direction.