

Los Angeles Times

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RIZZO LOANED BELL'S MONEY TO FIRMS

JEFF GOTTLIEB, RICHARD WINTON AND RUBEN VIVES

Then-Bell City Manager Robert Rizzo gave city loans of nearly \$400,000 to two businesses without public discussion, approval from the City Council or collateral to back the loans, according to documents reviewed by The Times.

One of the loans, \$300,000 to a local Chevrolet dealer in 2008, is the subject of a court fight because the dealer went out of business within a year of receiving the loan, having repaid nothing.

Although other cities sometimes lend money to local businesses for economic development, Rizzo granted the loans in a highly unusual way, with no statement of economic benefit to the city — a step that is commonplace in municipal loans.

The second loan was given in 2005 to the Steelworkers Old Timers Foundation, a senior citizens group run by George Cole, who was on the Bell City Council then. It is unclear whether the \$72,000 loan was repaid. After saying that he would discuss the loan, Cole did not return calls seeking comment.

Several experts said the secret loans violated basic tenets of municipal government and appeared to violate Bell's charter, which re- [See Bell, A12]

COLUMN ONE

Kenya's 'kill me quick'

The illicit brew *changaa* is a staple of the slums. A source of societal woes, it also supports poor women.

ROBYN DIXON REPORTING FROM NAIROBI, KENYA

He sits in her front room like a shy vicar from a Jane Austen novel. She's a widow with sad eyes. He's a married man with a kindly look. He cannot stay away from her for long.

She likes his soft politeness. He likes the neat room in her shack, with nearly everything veiled in white lace, hiding the battered surfaces beneath. They chat about small nothings.

He comes to her house in Nairobi's Kibera slum first thing on waking and last thing before sleeping. But he's not here for love, even if it sometimes feels like it. He's here for the illegal moonshine she brews, *changaa*. It means "kill me quick." He buys a glass and drinks it right there.

There's something quaint and courtly in their mutual corruption. Without her, Cosmas Asoha, 34, couldn't get up and go to work, would spend his nights lying awake feeling as though thousands of stinging insects were feeding on his skin. Without him, Florence Auma, 39, would be unable to feed her four children and five grandchildren or educate her two school-age daughters.

So they both ignore an undercurrent of guilt and behave as though their mutual need is beneficial.

Auma has asked Asoha's wife whether he provides for [See Kenya, A4]

Obama looks to home front



NICHOLAS KAMM AFP/Getty Images

CHALLENGES REMAIN: President Obama appealed for support from a nation impatient for progress on unemployment and other economic woes and increasingly weary of wars, including the one in Afghanistan.

4,416	31,882	112,625	\$801.9	170,300
U.S. fatalities in the war in Iraq	U.S. military wounded	Estimated Iraqi civilian fatalities	Cost of the war, in billions	U.S. deployment at its peak (Nov. 2007)

Sources: Brookings Institution, icasualties.org, Congressional Research Service. Graphics reporting by Tom Reinken



CAROLYN COLE Los Angeles Times

A TIME OF PEACE: Men cool off in the Tigris River in Baghdad this week as U.S. helicopters approach the fortified Green Zone. The area was off limits to swimmers during Saddam Hussein's dictatorship.

A CONFLICTED IRAQ

Many blame U.S. troops for the years of violence after the invasion, but they also fear what may lie ahead without them around.

LIZ SLY REPORTING FROM BAGHDAD

Muwafak Ali's downtown Baghdad music store is still pockmarked from the American rocket that whizzed through the door on one of the first days of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

He has since reopened, but business is bad. So are many of his memories concerning the seven-plus years of American combat operations that offi-

cially came to an end Tuesday.

"It would have been better if they didn't come, but now that they're here, they should stay," said Ali, 44, a wedding musician who hated Saddam Hussein, yet fondly remembers the days when the dictator was in control, the days before the chaos set in.

It's a view shared by many Iraqis as the American presence winds down to 50,000 troops serving in an advisory role.

Seven and a half years after then-President George W. Bush attacked

Iraq, Baghdad is a battered and weary city whose streets still bear the scars of a still inconclusive war, and whose residents are still groping to comprehend the magnitude of the changes that turned their lives upside down.

For more than 20 years they endured a dictatorship whose rules most didn't like, but easily understood. Then came the invasion, which many at first welcomed, followed by days of looting, years of insurgency, four governments and a sectarian war, transforming their [See Iraqis, A8]



DON BARTLETTI Los Angeles Times

THE PRICE OF SAFETY

Aida Garcia inspects eggs at Armstrong Egg Farms in Valley Center. State rules have all but eliminated salmonella at California egg farms, but the added cost of complying makes locally produced eggs more expensive. **BUSINESS, B1**

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'La Barbie' may shed light on drug rings

The capture of suspected drug lord Edgar Valdez Villarreal could give authorities a deeper look into Mexico's underworld. **WORLD, A3**

Missing woman's husband held

The O.C. man is arrested at a hospital after an apparent suicide try. His wife hasn't been seen in months. **LATEXTRA, AA1**

Project breaks new ground

Samitaur Tower marks a new stage for urban L.A., Christopher Hawthorne writes. **CALENDAR, D1**

Juicy news?

Apple is expected to unveil new products today. **BUSINESS, B1**

Safety-net insurance rates get even pricier

State's sick or jobless who rely on coverage of last resort face higher premiums.

DUKE HELFAND

As state leaders blast giant health insurers for raising rates, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration has quietly allowed hefty increases for thousands of sick or jobless Californians who must rely on expensive safety-net coverage — if they want insurance at all.

To the frustration of policyholders, state regulators have given insurance companies permission to raise maximum premiums

He declares combat over in Iraq and the U.S. economy his 'central responsibility'

CHRISTI PARSONS AND PAUL RICHTER REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

President Obama marked the end of the U.S. combat mission in Iraq on Tuesday by declaring that after more than seven years, vast expenditures and thousands of casualties, the nation must focus its shrunken resources on rebuilding the ailing domestic economy.

Addressing the nation for only the second time from the Oval Office, the president appealed for support from a country impatient for progress on unemployment and other economic woes and increasingly weary of wars, including the one in Afghanistan, which Obama has chosen to escalate.

As he has done several times recently, Obama made note of his campaign pledge to wind down the war in Iraq, which he opposed from the outset. "That is what we have done," he said. "We have removed nearly 100,000 U.S. troops from Iraq."

"Now it is time to turn the page," he said.

While acknowledging President George W. Bush's commitment to U.S. security and support for American troops, Obama sketched a damning picture of the conflict's effect on the economy.

"We have spent over a trillion dollars at war, often financed by borrowing from overseas. This, in turn, has shortchanged investments in our own people and contributed to record deficits. For too long, we have put off tough decisions on everything from our manufacturing base to our energy policy to education reform. As a result, too many middle-class families find themselves working harder for less, while our nation's long-term competitiveness is put at risk."

He offered no new proposals to address those woes. "But in the days to come," he said, "it must be our central mission as a people, and my central responsibility as president."

Obama tightly linked the move to wind down the Iraq war with the steps he has taken to significantly increase troop strength in Afghanistan. After nearly nine years of combat in Afghanistan, he acknowledged "tough questions about our mission there."

The U.S. troop increase in Afghanistan is scheduled to begin winding down in July. However, Obama left the pace of troop reductions unclear, saying they would depend on "conditions on the ground" as U.S. officials [See Obama, A9]

for most of the 20,000 Californians who depend on the coverage of last resort. Some who buy the insurance will have to pay an extra \$7,500 annually, pushing their bills to nearly \$25,000.

Healthcare advocates say that continued high unemployment in California could drive up the ranks of people in this high-risk pool who have no other options for protecting themselves against catastrophic medical expenses.

These vulnerable consumers could face higher-than-anticipated costs until at least 2014, when the nation's new healthcare law will require private insurers to cover all comers regardless of their health histories.

For now the state's move has been painful for policy- [See Insurance, A12]