

Los Angeles Times | LOCAL

LESS THAN 10¢ A DAY
Subscribe NOW!

LOCAL U.S. WORLD BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT HEALTH LIVING TRAVEL OPINION SHOP Weekly Ad

L.A. NOW POLITICS CRIME EDUCATION O.C. WESTSIDE NEIGHBORHOODS ENVIRONMENT OBITUARIES FINDLOCAL

IN THE NEWS: LINDSAY LOHAN | J. PAUL GETTY III | EGYPT | CARMELO ANTHONY AND THE LAKERS

Search



TICKETS ON SALE NOW!
FEBRUARY 18-21, 2011 | LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER

In court, Bell councilman says Robert Rizzo ran the city

Lorenzo Velez, the only Bell City Council member not charged with corruption, is aggressively questioned by defense attorneys seeking to discredit his claims of ignorance.



Bell City Councilman Lorenzo Velez is questioned by defense attorney Ronald Kaye at a hearing Tuesday on public corruption charges against six current and former council members. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times / February 8, 2011)

City Election Voter Guide »



Everything you need to know for the city and school board elections on March 8.

advertisement

TICKETS ON SALE NOW!



LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER
FEBRUARY 18-21, 2011

Today in Events »

- 2 for 1 Wednesdays for San Juan Capistrano Residents *Mission San Juan Capistrano*
- Beverly Hills Trolley Tours *Beverly Hills Trolley*
- Youth and Family Chess *Santa Monica Public Library*

What


Where

L.A. Times on Facebook

15 tweets 0 retweet

Share retweet

RELATED



6 charged in Bell corruption case reject plea deal

Full coverage: High salaries stir outrage in Bell

By Jeff Gottlieb and Christopher Goffard, Los Angeles Times

February 9, 2011

E-mail Print Share

Be the first of your friends to like this.

From his vantage as a longtime citizen of Bell, Lorenzo Velez said he was under the impression that the elected City Council ran his hometown.

When he was sworn in as a council member in October 2009, however, he said he learned that power was largely concentrated in one man's hands.

"Sir, who ran the city of Bell?" a prosecutor asked him

ADS BY GOOGLE

Criminal Lawyers
Experienced Criminal Defense
Lawyers in Pasadena. Call Now.
www.criminaldefender.net

Slip and Fall Injury Case
Understand Your Rights. Speak to
an Injury Lawyer for a Free
Consult
www.SlipandFallInjuryHelpLine.com

Workers Comp Attorney
30 Years Of Trial Exp. All Work
Comp Cases Call 800-400-8321
brentmthompson.com

Tuesday.

[Get the monthly that has L.A. talking. Subscribe to Los Angeles Times Magazine at a special introductory rate.](#)

"In my opinion, Mr. Robert Rizzo," Velez answered, naming Bell's former city administrator. "Everything had to go through Mr. Robert Rizzo."

Even after his own swearing-in, Velez said, Rizzo approached him and said he couldn't participate in the meetings. "I was sitting in my council seat, and Rizzo said in my ear, 'By the way, you can't vote on any of these issues because you're not a council member yet.' "

The testimony came on the second day of a preliminary hearing in Los Angeles County Superior Court to determine whether six current and former Bell council members should face trial in a sweeping corruption case. They are accused of drawing big salaries for sitting on city commissions that

seldom or never met.

In back-to-back hearings expected to follow this month, prosecutors will focus on allegations that Rizzo and his former assistant Angela Spaccia wrote their own lucrative employment contracts without council approval. Rizzo, charged with more than 50 counts of corruption, is also accused of falsifying public records to hide his salary, giving out nearly \$1.9 million in unauthorized city loans and directing more than \$10 million in city business to the firm of his horseracing partner.

As he faced questioning from defense attorneys Tuesday, Velez — the only Bell council member who does not face criminal charges — often appeared befuddled and out of his depth. Attorneys questioned his claim that for months after he joined the council, he did not know of the existence of numerous city boards on which other council members sat.

Such boards are at the center of the prosecution's case, since they account for the bulk of the \$100,000 salaries paid to current and former council members.

Ronald Kaye, who represents former Councilman George Cole, said Velez made statements to district attorney investigators last summer that showed he knew the boards existed. The defense attorney pointed to a Bell council resolution in March 2010 showing that Velez voted to issue payments to one board.

"You voted for something you knew nothing about?" Kaye asked.

"I was kind of ignorant of the procedure," Velez said. "If ignorance is a crime, I guess I'm guilty."

After the morning session, Velez said he felt intimidated on the witness stand. "They're pushing me to answer things I can't recollect," he said.

With documents to bolster its case against the current and former council members, the state is not totally reliant on Velez's testimony. But defense attorneys tried aggressively to discredit him.

"You can't be Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm sitting on the council for as long as he has," said Stanley L. Friedman, the attorney representing Mayor Oscar Hernandez, one of the defendants.

Velez, who is seeking to keep his seat in next month's city election, said he rarely read resolutions that he voted on. "I just followed the recommendation of Mr. Rizzo or the city attorney," he said.

The hearing continues Wednesday.

jeff.gottlieb@latimes.com

christopher.goffard@latimes.com

Times staff writer Corina Knoll contributed to this report.



Republican-led House fails to pass short-term extension of Patriot Act
650 people shared this.



Lakers should trade Andrew Bynum for Carmelo Anthony
1,049 people shared this.



Fed's Ben Bernanke says he's not worried about inflation
96 people shared this.

The Latest | NEWS AS IT HAPPENS



Made in Germany: NYSE stock trades? - *L.A. Times Business* 02/09/2011, 11:21 a.m.

Made in Germany: NYSE stock trades? - *L.A. Times Business* 02/09/2011, 11:21 a.m.

100 UC Irvine faculty members ask district attorney to drop charges against Muslim students - *L.A. Now* 02/09/2011, 11:20 a.m.

Question of the Day: Would Carmelo Anthony make the Lakers a better team? - *The Fabulous Forum* 02/09/2011, 11:08 a.m.

Authorities want DNA sample, fingerprints from Lindsay Lohan - *L.A. Now* 02/09/2011, 11:00 a.m.

Save. Share. Connect.



RSS »



Twitter »



Facebook »



Mobile »



Alerts »

MOST VIEWED | **MOST COMMENTED**

House GOP leaders release list of spending cuts

Omar Suleiman warns of coup as tensions rise between Egyptian demonstrators, army

Store video, paparazzi photos to be cited in Lindsay Lohan necklace-theft case, sources say

Virginia Sen. Jim Webb to step down after just one term

Fed's Ben Bernanke says he's not worried about inflation

Another Democrat out: Jim Webb won't seek Senate reelection in 2012

3 car bombs kill 7 in Iraq

Talks between North, South Korea collapse

Scandal-plagued Vernon to hire prominent lawyers for ethics review

Dodgers, Angels could use Michael Young &— but it gets complicated

ADS BY GOOGLE

Dui Defense Attorney

LA Defenders - Fight Your Case and Win - Aggressive and Experienced

www.LosAngelesDefenders.com

White Collar Crime Lawyer

Best Lawyers' Top White Collar Atty Criminal Defense Firm (949)369-3700

bm.kattorneys.com

Serious Criminal Defense

Aggressive criminal defense. Call for Free Consultation 24/7!

LibertyBellLaw.com/criminal-defense



POWERED BY **surphace**

RELATED STORIES

From the L.A. Times

- Bell defense attorneys say witness not being honest
- Bell defense attorneys say witness not being honest, knew of boards that contributed to...
- 6 charged in Bell corruption case reject plea deal

From KTLA





- WeHo City Council Votes to Ban Outdoor Smoking | ktla.com
- Bell Meeting to Decide Fate of Cops Canceled | ktla.com

Around the Web


- Dog Rescuer Wants Michael Vick to Return Key to Dallas | aolnews.com
- Former City Council Woman Dies | blogs.courant.com
- Under proposal, community panel to choose City Council members | baltimoresun.com

AT&T U-verse® TV has people all a-Twitter.  \$29 /MO FOR 6 MONTHS PLUS \$100 BACK VIA PROMOTION CARD. [SEE WHY](#) 

 E-mail  Print

 Digg  Twitter  Facebook  Read This Later [Share](#)

Get the Top of the Times Newsletter

 The best in investigative and insightful reporting. See a sample | [Sign up](#)

Get Alerts on Your Mobile Phone

Mobile Phone (required)

Sign me up for the following lists:

- BREAKING - News as it happens
- ENVELOPE - The awards insider
- ENTERTAINMENT - Hollywood news and buzz
- SPORTS - Alerts and scores

Southern California Moments »



Every day of 2011, we'll pick a photo you submit to share with readers. [View submissions](#)

Comments (6)

Add / View comments | Discussion FAQ

areeda at 11:42 AM February 09, 2011

I'm really looking forward to how this all works out. I do not see a way to legally discriminate between what Bell officials did and how most of California government operates. I agree what these people did SHOULD be criminal but:

- If \$100,000/year for the city council is criminal, what about the \$170K LA city councilmen get paid?
- If getting paid to sit on a do-nothing committee is criminal, what about all the retired state lawmakers on the Honeybee or the Strawberry committee?
- If not disclosing total compensation is a crime, tell me how much are the benefit packages worth for the Governor, Attorney General, State Legislators, City Councilmen, County Supervisors? I haven't seen those numbers.
- If fining businesses without a court hearing is criminal, well shoot, how many fines issues in Los Angeles are settled without a hearing?
- If it's some sort of conspiracy to overpay yourself, well how is that different from every other city and county?

The problem is endemic and I don't see a clear criminal line to draw between what Bell did and what Los Angeles still does?

What are the chances of getting lawmakers to make a law that cuts off their own gravy train?

DangerMouse at 8:27 AM February 09, 2011

This is why we need to continue to support 'Anchor Babies'. Where else can we get a supply of corrupt, 3rd World politicians?

SojournerOfTruth at 8:06 AM February 09, 2011

Where were the citizens of Bell while all this was going on? The apathy of the electorate greatly exceeds any guilt of the elected.

Comments are filtered for language and registration is required. The Times makes no guarantee of comments' factual accuracy. Readers may report inappropriate comments by clicking the Report Abuse link. Here are the full legal terms you agree to by using this comment form.

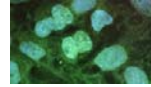
Inside The Times



Ojai, an oasis of art and serenity



The new red carpet



Stem cells for broken hearts



House call: Face-lift turns doctor's office into a couple's modern retreat

In Case You Missed It...



How to tell if you're having a heart attack



Photos: 'Star Wars' Lego models at Legoland



How I Made It: PacSun chief Gary Schoenfeld



114 recipes for your favorite restaurant dishes



Book review: 'While Mortals Sleep' by Kurt Vonnegut

More spotlights...



CRANBERRY WALNUT CHICKEN SALAD SANDWICH
and
BAJA FISH TACOS
AVAILABLE NOW.

**FIND A CPK NEAR YOU
OR ORDER ONLINE**

[Horoscopes](#)

[LATMG Media Kit](#)

[Events](#)

[About Us](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Contact Us](#) | [Help](#)

Los Angeles Times

[Coastline Pilot](#) | [Daily Pilot](#) | [Huntington Beach Independent](#) | [Valley Sun](#) | [Burbank Leader](#) | [News Press](#) | [KTLA](#) | [Hoy](#) | [Brand X](#) | [LA, Los Angeles Times Magazine](#)
[ZAP2it](#)

[Baltimore Sun](#) | [Chicago Tribune](#) | [Daily Press](#) | [Hartford Courant](#) | [Los Angeles Times](#) | [Orlando Sentinel](#) | [Sun Sentinel](#) | [The Morning Call](#)

[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | Los Angeles Times, 202 West 1st Street, Los Angeles, California, 90012 | Copyright 2011

A Tribune Newspaper website