



For Immediate Release
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BASTA Demands Immediate Return of Public Funds From Old Timers' Foundation and Randy C. Sopp, Reiterates Demand for Public Explanation from Former Councilman George Cole

The onion continues to peel off of the unethical, immoral and now it seems illegal practices of former Bell City Manager Robert Rizzo. City documents reveal Rizzo was using Bell taxpayer dollars as his own personal bank offering large loans without city council approval. Two such loans, which records indicate, were never paid back went to Randy C. Sopp and former councilmember George Cole's Old Timers Foundation.

"The arrogance of Robert Rizzo is almost beyond explanation. But what is more disturbing is that two people who are so familiar to Bell residents Randy Sopp and George Cole took those loans and never returned the money. We demand full repayment immediately!," said BASTA representative Ali Saleh.

The loans to Sopp the owner of the now defunct Randy Sopp Chevrolet total as much as \$800,000. The original loan of \$500,000 was apparently forgiven on the promise that Sopp Chevrolet would stay in Bell. The dealership went out of business within a year of that promise. It is unclear whether city council approved that arrangement. Documents, however, seem to indicate the second loan of \$300,000 to Sopp was not granted to his dealership but to him personally and was not approved by city council. According to veteran municipal lawyer Michael G. Colantuano as quoted in the LA Times. "It's plainly illegal."

"George Cole again seems to be caught in the middle of Rizzo's abuse of Bell tax dollars. We are concerned and we think as a longtime Bell councilman George Cole owes this community answers," said BASTA representative Marcos Oliva.

The State Attorney General's office has announced that it is looking into issues related to the Old Timer's Foundation where Cole has served as its CEO for more than twenty years. Specifically, the AG's office is investigating the Old Timer's non-disclosure of government contracts. The foundation currently has a \$38,000 a month contract with Bell to supply Dial-A-Ride services.

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Three weeks ago, BASTA leadership released a press release asking for Councilman Cole to provide a public answer to the following questions:

Did you vote on contracts to provide funds to the Old Timer's Foundation at the same time you served as its CEO and a Bell Council member?

How many contracts did the Old Timer's Foundation have with the City of Bell and what were the dollar amounts of those contracts?

Who are the Board member of the Old Timers Foundation?

Will you publicly release all Old Timers Foundation financial records including a list of all their subcontractors?

Why did you support a City Charter that gave so much power to Robert Rizzo?

What was the criterion for hiring Robert Rizzo as city manager?

How many candidates other than Rizzo did council members interview?

Did you know about Rizzo's prior personnel issues in the cities of Hesperia and Rancho Cucamonga prior to hiring him?

"While investigations have answered some of our questions, not a word from George Cole. One would think he was never part of the Bell community. Based on what we are finding out about his actions when he was a lot of us are wishing he never was," concluded BASTA representative Denisse Rodarte.

BASTA is a coalition of the Bell Police Officer's Association and Bell residents who are committed to restoring ethical and honest governance to the City of Bell.

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