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RICK LOOMIS Los Angeles Times

HONORING THE FALLEN

Valerie Mendoza, the widow of Marine Sgt. Matthew Mendoza of San Antonio, hugs his father, Raul, during a memorial service Friday at the Marine Corps base in Twentynine Palms, Calif., for 20 military personnel who died during a recent deployment to Afghanistan. Mendoza, 24, was killed in an explosion June 20. **CALIFORNIA, B3**

Bush might divert funds to automakers

The White House considers tapping the \$700-billion Wall Street aid package to keep the Big 3 afloat.

JIM PUZZANGHERA
REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON
KEN BENSINGER

With General Motors and Chrysler near bankruptcy and the failure of a \$14-billion bailout bill for U.S. automakers, the White House was preparing to step in with short-term aid to prevent what could be a catastrophic hit to the economy.

President Bush and Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson were weighing their options Friday, although officials said action was unlikely this weekend.

The White House said Bush was considering tapping the \$700-billion Wall Street bailout fund — even though he previously said that money should be used only for financial institutions.

“A precipitous collapse of this industry would have a severe impact on our economy, and it would be irresponsible to further weaken and destabilize our economy at this time,” White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said.

General Motors has said it needs \$4 billion by the end of the month and an additional \$6 billion by March 31, and Chrysler also was asking for \$4 billion in emergency loans to make it to the spring. Ford has not requested funds but has said the failure of GM or Chrysler would endanger it as well.

The White House statement came as GM announced massive production cuts through the first quarter of next year, reducing its vehicle output by about 30%, or 250,000 vehicles. It will do that by idling 21 plants for a month, including three each in Canada and Mexico.

Chrysler had no statement Friday on the failure of the bailout bill in Congress, but Chairman Robert Nardelli, in an internal e-mail, told employees, “We must eliminate every unnecessary cost in every aspect of our business. . . . Continued cost reduction is important to ensure the future viability of the company.”

GM stock dropped 4.4% on Friday to \$3.94 and Ford shares fell 5.2% to \$2.39. Chrysler is privately held.

News of possible help from the White House tempered fears on Wall Street and in Detroit. GM spokesman Tony Cervone said the company was “encouraged by the White House’s willingness to consider other options.”

But at Star Ford in Glenview, Ill., [See Detroit, Page A16]



PAUL SANCYA Associated Press

General Motors will slash production. Above, a closed dealership in Warren, Mich.

SENATE GOP TOOK A SWIPE AT UNIONS

Those who killed the auto bailout deal were striking at an old foe.

JIM PUZZANGHERA
REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

The congressional push to help U.S. automakers was generally cast in terms of protecting the reeling national economy from another body blow — the collapse of one or more of Detroit’s Big Three.

But in killing the stopgap rescue plan worked out by President Bush and congressional Democrats, conservative Republicans — many from right-to-work states across the South — struck at an old enemy: organized labor.

“If the [United Auto Workers], which is perceived as one of the strongest unions in the country, can be put under control, that may send a message across the whole country,” said Michigan State University professor Richard Block, a labor relations expert.

Such antipathy to unions was an undercurrent through the weeks of negotiations leading up to Thursday’s Senate vote rejecting the plan.

Handing a defeat to labor and its Democratic allies in Congress was also seen as a preemptive strike in what is expected to be a major battle for the new Congress in January: the unions’ bid for a so-called card check law that would make it easier for them to organize workers, potentially reversing decades of declining power. The measure is strongly opposed by business groups.

“This is the Democrats’ first opportunity to pay off organized labor after the election,” read an e-mail circulated Wednesday among Senate Republicans. “This is a precursor to card check and other items. Republicans should stand firm and take their first shot against [See Unions, Page A14]

COLUMN ONE

Where danger comes in waves

Mavericks remains the place for surfers who thrive on near-death challenges, even as the sport’s corporate support washes away.

PETE THOMAS
REPORTING FROM
HALF MOON BAY, CALIF.

Greg Long has charged down the sheer face of a 40-foot wave, but it has broken with such explosiveness that he is devoured by an avalanche of white water.

Embroiled in turbulence and hurtling toward rocks, the San Clemente surfer strives for composure and struggles to climb the leash attached to his 9 1/2-foot surfboard, hand over fist.

Mavericks, the infamous big-wave surfing venue beyond Pillar Point, already has killed on this late November morning, which marks the arrival of the season’s first large swell.

Overhead, a Coast Guard helicopter crew searches for two fishermen whose boat had capsized.

Long has been submerged in the mid-50-degree water for 20 seconds. He cannot reach the surface. His right eardrum is ruptured, leaving him disoriented. He craves air and tugs so fiercely on his leash that the lower half of his board is pulled under.

Its nose points skyward, eerily, like a tombstone.

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These are tumultuous times for expert big-wave surfers. The recession has them on edge; the annual Mavericks contest, one of the world’s premier big-wave events, is in jeopardy because of sponsorship troubles. Surfers themselves find it difficult to lure or maintain corporate support.

“Dreams are being crushed,” says Hawaii’s Mark Healey, who is sponsored by the surfwear company Quiksilver.

On the bright side, nature pays no attention to economics. A new season has dawned and Aleutian storms are generating massive, swift-moving swells.

Surfers will ride them regardless of income.

The swells first slam into Hawaii, then California, then Todos Santos Island off Ensenada. [See Column One, Page A22]

L.A. nonprofit spent zero on charity work in 2 years

Union local founded the group to provide low-income housing.

PAUL PRINGLE

A nonprofit organization founded by California’s largest union local reported spending nothing on its charitable purpose — to develop housing for low-income workers — during at least two of the four years it has been operating, federal records show.

The charity, launched by a scandal-ridden Los Angeles chapter of the Service Employees International Union, had total expenses of about \$165,000 for 2005 and 2006, and all of the money went to consulting fees, insurance costs and other overhead, according to its Internal Revenue Service filings.

Charity watchdogs say that nonprofit should never have zero program expenses in two successive years and that well-performing charities direct at least 70% of their annual spending to their charitable purpose.

“Of the 5,000-plus charities we’ve looked at, I don’t think we’ve ever seen one that didn’t spend anything on its charitable programs,” said Sandra Miniutti, vice president of Charity Navigator, an online rating service.

Last year, the nonprofit reported spending \$513,000 in connection with a Compton housing development, and \$59,200 in consulting fees for its [See Union, Page A23]

There she is, Russia

Contestants share the stage with rising nationalism at the Miss Constitution pageant.

MEGAN K. STACK
REPORTING FROM MOSCOW

Miss Constitution had yellow curls that bounced down her back, wide blue eyes and a sweet if faltering singing voice. She shimmied barefoot, donned a swimsuit in freezing temperatures and spoke plausibly about the responsibilities of the Russian state.

When her moment of glory came, Masha Fyodorova was draped in the Russian flag and handed the keys to a brand-new, pink-and-orange Mini Cooper. She strolled off the stage in a shower of confetti and sparklers, an economics student from the provinces reborn as the official paragon of patriotic womanhood.

The gathering Friday of B-list pop stars and hundreds of die-hard pro-Kremlin youth activists on the edge of Red Square was beauty pageant as patriotic ceremony, emblematic of today’s sexed-up, nationalistic Russia.

In between trilling traditional songs extolling the Moscow scenery and strutting in their bathing suits, the blond from Rostov-on-Don and three other nubile finalists paused to answer questions about authority, state obligations and the role of the elite.

“Who is the only source of authority in the Russian Federation?” the announcer asked.

“The multiethnic people of the Russian Federation!” one [See Russia, Page A9]



SERGEI L. LOIKO Los Angeles Times

KREMLIN-BACKED: A pageant contestant braves the cold in Red Square. In between singing and strutting, the finalists fielded questions about the constitution.

Van Johnson, 92, MGM war hero

“The Voiceless Sinatra” rose to fame playing servicemen during WWII. **CALIFORNIA, B8**



Getty Images

Did Emanuel call Blagojevich?

Sources say what Obama hasn’t said: The governor and the aide discussed the Senate seat. **NATION, A12**

Hugh as host

Jackman gives the Oscars life, says one critic. He’s wrong for the part, says another. **CALENDAR, E16**

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AL SREIB Los Angeles Times

The quest for design on the cheap

Designer Philippe Starck compares bath towels at a Big Lots store in Hollywood. Join Starck and other tastemakers as they discover elegance on a budget, a must for fine living in the grip of recession. **HOME, F1**