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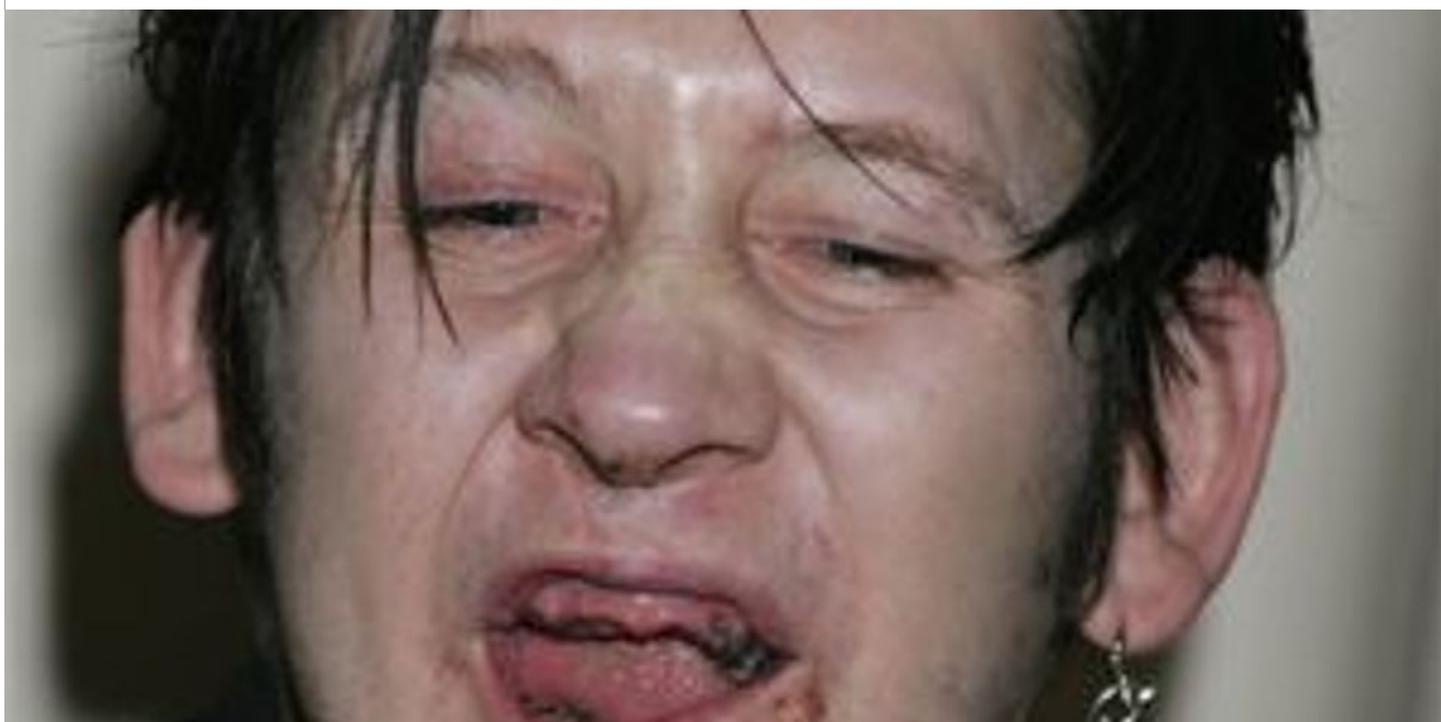
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US loans fueled insider deal, failed power plan in Liberia

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

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BUCHANAN, Liberia (AP) — The auburn-red soil and lush green vegetation lured the foreign investors to Liberia's third-largest city with visions of environmental gold.

They formed a company, Buchanan Renewables, and set anchor, crafting a plan to convert swaths of rubber trees into biomass chips that would power the impoverished nation and fuel their own profits.

The Overseas Private Investment Corporation, a little known U.S. government agency 4,700 miles away, backed the venture with \$217 million in loan approvals from 2008 to 2011.

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In this photo taken Jan. 21, 2015, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) building is seen on New York Avenue NW in Washington. A failed U.S. government-backed plan to produce environmentally friendly energy in one of Africa's poorest countries was marred by insider connections and questionable planning, an Associated Press investigation found. The federal agency at the center of the deal is one of the government's biggest secrets and routinely escapes public scrutiny. That agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, approved three loans totaling \$217 million to help a company, Buchanan Renewables, convert nonproducing rubber trees into biomass chips that would help power Liberia. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

Two years later, Buchanan shuttered its Liberian operations and dismissed 600 workers. It never built a promised power plant, so instead of powering a country in need, it shipped its biomass chips to Europe.

It repaid the U.S. government loans. It paid its non-African employees handsomely. But it left behind fields of depleted rubber farms and a trail of allegations of sexual abuse and workplace hazards.

From the start, an Associated Press examination found, OPIC's support for the power project in this western African country was marked by questionable due diligence and deep political links. Even for ostensibly philanthropic projects meant to aid the world's poorest, profit and corporate opportunities can intersect with family and business ties among Washington's political elite.

In Liberia, Buchanan's CEO was James Steele, a larger than life former U.S. military figure and onetime Texas business partner of OPIC's then-president and CEO, Robert Mosbacher Jr.

Mosbacher's father was commerce secretary under President George H.W. Bush. Steele drew acclaim, and attracted controversy, over his role in U.S. military exploits from Iran-Contra to Iraq, where he performed work for President George W. Bush's defense secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld.

Even before the Liberian project, Mosbacher had tapped Steele as a consultant to help OPIC develop power projects in hard-pressed countries. Over 22 months from 2006 to 2008, the agency paid Steele \$390,000 for consulting and an additional \$114,556 in travel, the AP found. Then it approved three loans to support Buchanan's vision in Liberia.

The venture collapsed amid tension between the company and Liberian government, questions from the U.S. Embassy and the withdrawal by a vital financier. As tensions escalated, troubling stories emerged: charcoal producers having to trade sex for wood that was promised as part of the undertaking; Buchanan's machinery cracking open an ancestor's grave on one family farm; the company leaving piles of woodchips that attracted stinging ants and fouled local waters.

Some women said they became pregnant after trading sex for sticks with Buchanan staff members in Liberia. "If we didn't have sex with the employees they wouldn't give you sticks," Sarah Monopoloh, chairwoman of a local charcoal sellers union, told the AP. She said she miscarried. "I nearly died in the process," Monopoloh said.

Tree planter Aderlyn Barnard was knocked unconscious, breaking a leg and wrist and dislocating an arm, when the company's clearing machine felled her with a tree. "I am one of the victims," she said. "Right now I am disabled."

To Mosbacher, who abstained from the OPIC's loan approval, the project was an opportunity lost.

"This was absolutely for the best of intentions and that's why it was literally the biggest disappointment I had from all my time at OPIC," said Mosbacher, the agency head from 2005 to 2009. "What seemed to be a home run, a win-win, just didn't work out the way any of us had hoped."

Backing the project at every stage was a U.S. agency that approves more than \$3 billion a year in global financing but whose profile is so low it regularly cancels annual public hearings because no one signs up to speak.

In all, OPIC handed out \$77 million of the \$217 million approved in Liberia.

The last loan came under the current president and CEO, Elizabeth Littlefield. As the

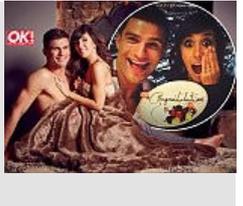
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Strictly Come Dancing had to be re-recorded


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longtime head of the global Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, she once bought a fleet of scooters so executives could quickly zoom down the hallways in their office in Washington, D.C.

When OPIC approved the final loan, worth \$90 million, in 2011, the agency did not conduct an onsite environmental and social check for a project in a country haunted by a decade-long civil war and history of abuses against women, the AP found.

"There was just an utter failure of the due diligence process that OPIC is supposed to follow," said Natalie Bridgeman Fields, executive director of the Accountability Counsel, a San Francisco legal organization representing laborers in Liberia. "There are a lot of deep issues of that society that would require a high level of due diligence."

OPIC's own Office of Accountability questioned the agency's review process.

Buchanan's senior management had no prior experience in the rubber sector or in operating a commercial venture in Liberia, the accountability office said. The agency approved the loans despite incomplete background reviews involving key figures at OPIC and Buchanan, it found.

Littlefield called the report "unprecedented" and said OPIC was making reforms.

"OPIC is pleased to see that the report did not uncover any failure by OPIC to apply the policies and procedures that were in place at the time," she wrote.

For the men and women lured by Buchanan's promises, the project's collapse left a painful legacy.

"The workers are still grieving today," said Alfred Brownell, executive director of Green Advocates International, a legal advocacy group in Monrovia, the Liberian capital. "The only thing Liberia got was the massive cutting down of rubber trees."

BIG MANDATE, LOW PROFILE

The Liberian financing is one piece of an \$18 billion portfolio for a U.S. agency that issues loans, loan guarantees and political risk insurance.

Its projects span the globe, including solar power plants in Chile, palm oil plantations in Honduras and hydropower generation facilities in Georgia.

OPIC operates from Washington with a staff of 230. President Barack Obama appointed Littlefield, a former World Bank official and steady Democratic donor, the agency's 10th CEO.

Launched in 1969 by President Richard Nixon, OPIC bills itself as the U.S. government's development finance institution.

Of \$3 billion in financing it approved last budget year, a record \$1.2 billion was committed for renewable energy. Self-sustaining, the agency has returned money to the U.S. coffers 37 straight years.

Despite its global mission, OPIC flies under the radar. Littlefield herself has called it the "best-kept secret in government." For an agency operating in 102 countries, it rarely undergoes deep scrutiny. Its Office of Accountability — created in 2005 — has issued reports on just five deals over a period when OPIC has approved more than 530 projects.

The office's previous director served through September to finish the Liberia report. The position has been vacant since.

OPIC's financings have sometimes been the subject of criminal fraud investigations, raising questions about the agency's loan review process.

Last September, a Texas businessman got 27 months in prison for defrauding OPIC and a private company of nearly \$1.7 million in a project to produce toilet paper and napkins in Mexico, the Justice Department said. OPIC had guaranteed 97.5 percent of losses in the company's \$10 million financing.

Earlier, four defendants got prison for defrauding OPIC from 2003 to 2005 in securing a \$9.4 million loan to fund a milling and bakery project in Estonia.

The most noteworthy criminal case involves InnoVida Holdings Inc., a Miami Beach, Florida, company that won a \$10 million OPIC loan to help build prefabricated housing for victims of the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

Jeb Bush, the former Republican governor of Florida who is considering running for president in 2016, served as a board member of InnoVida when the loan was approved in January 2010. Bush later left InnoVida and is not accused in the criminal case.

InnoVida's owner, Claudio Osorio, pleaded guilty in 2013 to wire fraud and money laundering. One charge involved the \$10 million OPIC loan, which prosecutors said Osorio used to repay investors and for his own benefit. In a Miami courtroom, Osorio got 12½ years in prison.

His Haiti plan had been in development for months when the earthquake struck, prompting OPIC to accelerate the project. OPIC loaned \$3.3 million before the fraud was unmasked, money it seeks to recover in bankruptcy proceedings.

OPIC spokesman Charles Stadtlander said the criminal cases were isolated incidences spread over a decade for an agency that consistently maintains a default rate below 1 percent.

"That's something private institutions would aspire to," he said, "and we are doing this in some of the most challenging environments across the world." He said OPIC plans to fill the accountability director position, a job that he said was created to respond to complaints.

While the Export-Import Bank has received congressional scrutiny in recent months, OPIC has been spared such attention.

"Most of the public has never even heard of OPIC, much less what it does," said Doug Norlen, a senior program manager with Friends of the Earth, a coalition of environmental

Monica Pier
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groups, and among the few people who follow the agency. "Usually when I start to talk to people about OPIC they think I am talking about OPEC."

Norlen has seen OPIC sharpen its focus on protecting the environment. But he believes the agency still must improve transparency, noting that OPIC — while touting its overall successes — does not publicly disclose the outcomes of individual projects.

"There can be some very negative development impacts, displacement, human rights violations and environmental degradation," Norlen said. "We think they should disclose that."

OPIC posts brief descriptions of projects it approves but not regular updates on their status. Stadlander said the agency is "trying to get better at reporting that out."

A STATE LUNCHEON, DAWN OF A PROJECT AND JIM STEELE

The Liberia project's origins spawned during a state luncheon in 2006, when then-CEO Mosbacher walked through a receiving line and met Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia's president. She asked whether OPIC was open to doing business in Liberia.

"She said, 'Help us.' And the president was standing next to her," Mosbacher recalled. "And he said, 'Mosbacher, help her.'"

That was George W. Bush, who appointed Mosbacher as CEO.

Power was Liberia's priority. Mosbacher turned to his friend Steele, who that year had returned from Iraq, to pursue potential energy projects.

They had worked together in the family business of Mosbacher Sr., the Texas oilman and prominent Republican who died in 2010.

In 1995 the elder Mosbacher had plucked Steele from Enron, where he worked on gas pipelines and power plants overseas. Steele became president and CEO of Mosbacher Power Group, where Mosbacher Jr. was vice chairman. Three years later, Steele became president and chief executive of TM Power Ventures, a joint venture between TECO Power Services and Mosbacher Power Group, where Mosbacher Jr. was vice chair.

Earlier, Steele spent 24 years in the Army. He earned decorations including a Silver Star in Vietnam, when, after his troop encountered gunfire, he "crawled through the hail of hostile fire" to rescue an injured comrade.

His military exploits also have led to scrutiny. In the 1980s, the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee called Steele to testify about the Iran-contra scandal.

In Iraq, the retired colonel served as special envoy for Rumsfeld and senior counselor to top diplomat Paul Bremer for Iraqi security forces.

Steele did not respond to AP interview requests through Mosbacher and a speaker's bureau that represented him.

At OPIC, Mosbacher said he retained Steele as a consultant to help the organization explore power projects in emerging markets. He said OPIC lacked the internal business development staffing to aggressively seek new undertakings, saying it is "staffed mostly to react to projects brought to it."

In all, OPIC paid nearly \$505,000 from August 2006 to May 2008 for Steele's consulting and travel costs to Liberia, Central America, Central Asia, Pakistan and the Middle East. He stayed at the Hyatt Regency Dubai, Four Seasons hotels in Vancouver and Amman, Jordan and the Islamabad Serena Hotel, according to records obtained by AP under the Freedom of Information Act.

His global travels and accompanying bills were so extensive, Steele wrote to OPIC one Friday evening in October 2006. "Help!" he emailed. "My credit card bills are in the tens of thousands and no OPIC reimbursement as yet. Thanks, Jim"

The following Tuesday morning, an OPIC staffer alerted colleagues: "Please make it a point to pay his invoices right away. He is a contractor in the President's office."

In early 2008, Steele traveled to Monrovia as an OPIC consultant.

Ultimately, he made acquaintance with John McCall MacBain, a philanthropist whose Pamoja Capital investment arm became the lead foreign sponsor of the Liberian biomass venture.

Steele became CEO of Buchanan Renewables, and in each of the three loans from OPIC that followed, was one of the U.S. sponsors. MacBain did not respond to interview requests.

LOANS AND RED FLAGS

Mosbacher saw no issue between his stewardship of the agency and loans approved to a company employing his former business colleague. He said there was "complete disclosure" about Steele's role. OPIC's subsequent investigation disputed this.

"I didn't own any part of his business," Mosbacher said. "I didn't have any financial relationship with him whatever."

The accountability office said their close, past relationship raised potential reputational risks for the government agency. The report did not name the executive and the OPIC official it said "had been involved in various transactions and professional activities."

AP confirmed the report was referring to Steele and Mosbacher.

OPIC conducts diligence checks on the corporate officers to whom it gives money. It conducted these reviews on other executives with Buchanan Renewable Energy (BRE), the parent company. But the accountability office said OPIC was not provided this information involving Steele when it approved the project.

OPIC's board approved the biggest loan in September 2008, a \$111.7 million financing to help Buchanan Renewables (Monrovia) Power Inc. build a rubber wood fired biomass

'pocket money'

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electricity generation facility. The loan would bankroll 75 percent of the \$148.9 million total cost.

Though Mosbacher supported funding the project, he did not vote on this loan, the agency said.

The government of Liberia never signed off on the power plant, and the money was not handed out. Still, the approval signaled OPIC's support for Buchanan's Liberian blueprint.

Also in 2008, OPIC approved a \$15 million loan to help Buchanan Renewables Fuel Liberia Inc. produce wood chips from unproductive rubber trees. OPIC disbursed the money in March 2009, and Buchanan began harvesting rubber trees on the vast Firestone Plantation north of Monrovia.

The final \$90 million loan allowed Buchanan Renewables Fuel to expand its biomass operation by contracting with local plantation and farm owners to remove aged rubber trees, and process them into wood chips. Plans called for Buchanan to plant new seedlings to rejuvenate farms.

By 2012, OPIC had handed out \$62 million of the \$90 million. The company was portraying itself as a good neighbor in Buchanan, a port city some 90 miles south of Monrovia. "Welcome to the City of Buchanan," one billboard announced. "The Home of Buchanan Renewables. Working Towards (sic) a Brighter Future."

The promises proved hollow.

The project's collapse was triggered by myriad factors converging in a country where large projects are challenging under any circumstances.

Buchanan's executives, new to commercial enterprises in Liberia, set overly ambitious projections, the watchdog report concluded. Its owner overpaid for key assets on the ground, straining pressure for production even as operating expenses were high, with Buchanan paying "generous benefit packages for expatriate employees."

Unable to build its power plant, the company ended up shipping biomass chips to Europe.

Other problems arose. Under its agreement, Buchanan was to share discarded pieces of Firestone rubber trees with charcoal producers from nearby Freeman Reserve.

"The workers took advantage of that," said Sarah Singh, an Accountability Counsel lawyer who visited Liberia. "They would call them your girlfriend. As long as you were their girlfriend they would set aside sticks for you so you could make a living."

Liberia had drawn shame for abuses against women during the country's civil war. One 1998 study said 49 percent of women interviewed reported "at least one act of physical or sexual violence by a soldier or fighter." A U.N. report said sexual violence was a characterizing feature of the civil war.

Tensions escalated between charcoal producers and industry.

Before Buchanan set up shop, area charcoalers sustained their trade by tapping discarded trees that Firestone no longer used from the company's mammoth plantation. With Buchanan clearing trees, Firestone prohibited farmers from producing charcoal on its land. The situation became so intense, Firestone hired an ex-rebel commander who patrolled the plantation with AK-47s, advocates said.

OPIC's accountability office explored this conflict. Buchanan Renewables Fuel "operators required charcoalers to pay for the roots and branches that BRF had previously agreed to give them at no cost, and a Firestone contractor posted 'no burning' signs and demanded \$350 (Liberian dollars) as 'registration' for permission to burn," it said. "Female charcoalers who could not afford the payment for wood were offered the opportunity to pay with sexual favors."

Buchanan and Firestone managers told OPIC they did not sanction these practices.

Joseph and Charles Bryant, who ran a family farm, told advocates investigating the project's aftermath that Buchanan's machinery cracked open a grave on the family's farm. They blamed contaminated runoff from discarded wood chips for polluting a nearby creek, and said a 3-year-old child who drank water died. The AP was not able to verify the cause of the child's death.

Another worker suffered a snake bite after not getting proper footwear. The company dumped woodchips on area farms, attracting stinging ants and fouling the water supply when rains came.

Overall, former accountability director Keith Kozloff concluded that worker complaints "have varying degrees of credibility. Importantly, several allegations have a significant degree of credibility." Asked in an interview to cite his most important reform, Kozloff cited one suggesting enhanced due diligence involving human rights.

Mosbacher learned of the abuses reading the report. "I hope it's not true. If it is, it's extremely disappointing and unexpected," he said. "Jim Steele had a pretty darn impressive military record for years and is a high integrity guy, so if that was going on, I can't imagine he knew about it."

A PROJECT'S COLLAPSE

Workers weren't the only ones raising questions. By March 2012, the U.S. Embassy cabled OPIC questioning Buchanan's business model and citing "tense exchanges" between the company and President Sirleaf.

A month later, an OPIC policy compliance group conducted its sole visit to Liberia, but said it failed to find any problems related to worker rights or environment, health and safety.

Others saw problems. That May, Swedish financiers withdrew from the enterprise. In November 2012, a former Buchanan human resources official sent OPIC a letter citing labor problems.

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► Zendaya adds a sultry edge to a pretty Victoriana dress as she flashes her abs in wide-set lace for The Hateful Eight premiere
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Sassy new look



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Date night



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► Going in a new direction? Jack Whitehall



By January 2013, Buchanan Renewables Fuel cancelled a remaining commitment of \$28 million it could have borrowed from OPIC, sold its fuel and power group, and repaid its debt. Within months, the company that pledged to revive the economy dismissed 600 workers.

In January 2014, worker advocates filed a formal complaint to OPIC. When Littlefield directed Kozloff to launch a "lessons-learned" review, she shared her view that the U.S. agency was not to blame. "Unfortunately, for reasons outside of OPIC's control, these projects did not progress as planned and our clients folded their operations in Liberia in early 2013," she wrote.

In Liberia, workers are still waiting to be compensated for their losses.

"In the end, only the poor farmers and the poor charcoal sellers became the losers," said Brownell. "If (Buchanan Renewable Energy) was able to fully pay OPIC's loan, why wasn't it able to address the impact it had on the small farmers and the workers?"

Charcoal producer Monopoloh asks the same question. "Our charcoal business was fine," she said, "until BRE came."

Greene reported from Washington.



In photo taken Dec. 2014, a market in Buchanan, Liberia constructed by Buchanan Renewables is one of the few signs remaining of the company's presence in the city. Its Liberian biomass project, backed by the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation, collapsed. A failed U.S. government-backed plan to produce environmentally friendly energy in one of Africa's poorest countries was marred by insider connections and questionable planning, an Associated Press investigation found. The federal agency at the center of the deal is one of the government's biggest secrets and routinely escapes public scrutiny. That agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, approved three loans totaling \$217 million to help a company, Buchanan Renewables, convert nonproducing rubber trees into biomass chips that would help power Liberia. (AP Photo/Jonathan Paye-Layleh)



FILE - In this Jan. 22, 2007 file photo, an unidentified worker inspects collected latex at the Firestone rubber plantation in Monrovia, Liberia. A failed U.S. government-backed

transform into Harry Styles as he auditions for 1D at the Royal Variety Performance



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Stood out



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Trim and toned



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Legs be having you



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Red-dy to party



▶ Michelle Dockery, 33, battles it out in the style stakes



plan to produce environmentally friendly energy in one of Africa's poorest countries was marred by insider connections and questionable planning, an Associated Press investigation found. The federal agency at the center of the deal is one of the government's biggest secrets and routinely escapes public scrutiny. That agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, approved three loans totaling \$217 million to help a company, Buchanan Renewables, convert nonproducing rubber trees into biomass chips that would help power Liberia. (AP Photo/George Osodi, File)



In this photo taken Nov. 6, 2010, Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) President and CEO Elizabeth Littlefield, is seen in Mumbai, India. A failed U.S. government-backed plan to produce environmentally friendly energy in one of Africa's poorest countries was marred by insider connections and questionable planning, an Associated Press investigation found. The federal agency at the center of the deal is one of the government's biggest secrets and routinely escapes public scrutiny. That agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, approved three loans totaling \$217 million to help a company, Buchanan Renewables, convert nonproducing rubber trees into biomass chips that would help power Liberia. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)

with youthful Elizabeth McGovern, 55, at Downton Abbey premiere in New York



On the promo trail

'Seems I'm an absolute pleasure to shoot': Amy Schumer shares sexy behind-the-scenes look at her Pirelli Calendar photo session



Posed naked

Alone Time! Bruce Willis, 60, can't stop smiling as he accompanies stunning wife Emma Heming, 37, on date night in NY



Handsome pair

'I gained 13 pounds my whole pregnancy': Coco Austin unveils slender figure ONE WEEK after welcoming Chanel as she claims she's now 137 pounds



Ivanka Trump adds a touch of class to her bump as she covers it up with an elegant sleeveless black number at Valentino event



'I am a lucky, lucky girl!' Grey's Anatomy's Jessica Capshaw announces she is pregnant with her fourth child



Very special Christmas



FILE -In this Nov. 4, 1997 file photo, then-Houston mayoral candidate Rob Mosbacher poses outside the polls in Houston. A failed U.S. government-backed plan to produce environmentally friendly energy in one of Africa's poorest countries was marred by insider connections and questionable planning, an Associated Press investigation found. The federal agency at the center of the deal is one of the government's biggest secrets and routinely escapes public scrutiny. That agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, approved three loans totaling \$217 million to help a company, Buchanan Renewables, convert nonproducing rubber trees into biomass chips that would help power Liberia. (AP Photo/Pat Sullivan, File)

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Just turned 30



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Is that a wedding dress?



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Stepping out in style



▶ **Bindi gets a bundle! Irwin given approval from**





FILE - In this Dec. 19, 1986 file photo, Army Col. James Steele, left, arrives for a meeting of the Senate Intelligence Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington. A failed U.S. government-backed plan to produce environmentally friendly energy in one of Africa's poorest countries was marred by insider connections and questionable planning, an Associated Press investigation found. The federal agency at the center of the deal is one of the government's biggest secrets and routinely escapes public scrutiny. That agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, approved three loans totaling \$217 million to help a company, Buchanan Renewables, convert nonproducing rubber trees into biomass chips that would help power Liberia. (AP Photo/Tom Reed, File)

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approval from judge to collect \$350,000 in winnings after taking DWTS glitterball trophy
Finally got paid



Queen of the Jungle Vicky Pattison shows off her toned curves in chic floral two-piece as she celebrates I'm A Celeb win with Ferne McCann and George Shelley



Not born to be a bride! Comedienne Handler wears pink wedding dress in new trailer for Chelsea Does documentary and says she looks 'stupid'



EXCLUSIVE: 'He drugged me, abused me and raped me.' Farrah Abraham claims she was so traumatized by porn star James Deen she needed therapy



Revealed: Kim Kardashian had a 'long and painful birth' before welcoming her baby boy Saint West due to placenta complication
Serious condition



Lara Stone leaves nothing to the imagination as she channels her inner Brigitte Bardot while posing for smouldering topless new shoot



He's really Gonna! Blake Shelton performs single about pursuing new love in front of girlfriend Gwen Stefani on The Voice
Loved up pair



What a difference 24 hours makes: Mel Gibson appears bloated as he strolls around Sydney a day after cutting a toned figure on the red carpet



'I stupidly jumped off really high up and smashed it': Ed Sheeran reveals he'll have surgery next month after bursting his eardrum



'It was boring for everyone else': Adele says being a mother made it 'impossible' to write songs... because she's never been happier



The happy



hitman! Michael Fassbender is full of mirth as he mingles with crew on the set of Assassin's Creed in Spain

Loving life on set



▶ Pamela Anderson transforms from ski slope sensation to silver siren in busty gown during Austrian Formula Snow event



▶ 'He's a kinky, weird guy': Lala Kent ditches James Kennedy after he shows off sex scratches on Bravo's Vanderpump Rules

Not impressed



▶ 'This is insane!' The terrifying moment Khloe Kardashian found herself surrounded by growling lions as she filmed KUWTK

Gripped with fear



▶ Kourtney Kardashian flashes toned tum in white crop top and black leather biker jacket while out and about in LA

On her way to see Saint?



▶ 'I can't wait to share my life with you!': Kourtney Kardashian reveals her passions on her new app... including home decor, kids stuff and healthy eating tips



▶ 'You're really f*ing me off!': Made In Chelsea's Lucy Watson orders sister Tiffany to move out as the rift between them grows**

Sisterly row



▶ Denise Van Outen, 41, seeking 'quickie' divorce from estranged actor husband Lee Mead, 34, in court on Tuesday

She's ready to move on



▶ Strictly Come Dancing's heartthrob Gleb Savchenko enjoys a casual date with his wife Elena Samodanova at the ballet



▶ 'It's a TV show and a lot goes on behind the scenes': X Factor's Lauren Murray admits the show wasn't what she expected... as she hits back at 'fix' claims



▶ **Victoria's Secret Angel Taylor Hill reveals she was tormented by bullies because of her tall and skinny physique - as she admits she felt 'invisible' in high school**



▶ **That's awkward! Pete Wentz jets out of Los Angeles after Kim Kardashian and Kanye West copy his baby Saint's unusual name**
Ultimate celeb disaster



▶ **Kristin Cavallari's missing brother asked for directions before his car was discovered in Utah - and was arrested for making criminal threats four days prior**



▶ **'Um, please don't': The Walking Dead star Norman Reedus shares playful Instagram post after getting bitten by overzealous fan during meet and greet**



▶ **Winona Ryder unveiled as new face of Marc Jacobs Beauty... 14 years after her arrest for shoplifting one of the designer's sweaters**
Stole MJ jumper



▶ **EXCLUSIVE: Brazen thieves target Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop pop-up store in New York - and run off with \$173,000 of merchandise after breaking display case**



▶ **Boys' night out: Wayne Rooney takes his eldest son Kai, six, to see his home team Everton**
Father and son bonding at Goodison Park in Liverpool



▶ **'Photobombed by some crazy fan': Blake Lively has her selfie ruined by new BFF Taylor Swift as she cosies up to a kangaroo**



▶ **Reggie N Bolie perform in mentor Cheryl Fernandez-Versini's Newcastle hometown ahead of X Factor finals... but judge is nowhere to be seen**



▶ **Pregnant Chrissy Teigen copies pal Kim Kardashian's maternity style by pairing long beige**



coat with tight dress and sky-high heels for NYC outing



▶ Striking the right note! Naomi Watts and Liev Schreiber take their lads Alexander and Kai to the Broadway premiere of School Of Rock musical
Together for a decade



▶ She's mad for plaid! Reese Witherspoon is fashionable as always in red gingham top tucked into a black skirt while out in LA



▶ Just Do It! Comedienne Rebel Wilson wears scarlet Nike T-Shirt to work out in the gym as she continues to hike up fitness regime



▶ Blooming lovely! Eddie Murphy's pregnant girlfriend Paige Butcher shows off baby bump in clingy black dress on coffee run
More coffee!



▶ 'Worth it': Kate Upton shows off her sprained ankle after injuring it celebrating beating her parents at American pasttime cornhole
Stateside game



▶ Mark Wahlberg keeps it casual as co-star Will Ferrell suits up at the Dublin premiere of comedy film Daddy's Home



▶ Auntie en route! Khloe Kardashian arrives at LA hospital in Bentley to visit Kim and new nephew Saint West
First Reign, now Saint...
We sense a theme



▶ First look: Khloe Kardashian brings camera to Thanksgiving admitting she's 'grateful after so much s*' she got Kris and Caitlyn at her table... but no Rob**



▶ Taylor Swift organises surprise meeting with a 12-year-old cystic fibrosis sufferer who sang her hit songs to repair her lungs and add years to her life



▶ 'I just wanted to strip off': Jorgie Porter reveals she wanted to get naked in the



jungle... and have sex with 'dirty' Duncan Bannatyne, 66

Was hardly out of bikini



▶ **Candice Swanepoel is a naughty angel in white sweater dress with kinky boots as she reveals the best models are discovered at shopping malls**



▶ **Selena Gomez strips down to her underwear in sultry teaser for her upcoming Hands To Myself video**

No wonder Justin can't move on



▶ **'Tis the season! Victoria Beckham gets into the festive spirit as she models her new fashion collection with a Santa hat in NYC**

So she CAN be a joker



▶ **Dame Helen Mirren, 70, shows us how to grow old disgracefully as she sticks her tongue out in a school-inspired ensemble at School of Rock musical**



▶ **Gorgeous in green: Zendaya shows off her elegant style as she hosts T-Boz Unplugged concert in LA**

Starlet looked polished



▶ **Pregnant Anne Hathaway covers baby bump in flowing blouse while dining out with husband Adam Shulman and friends**

'Five months pregnant'



▶ **Naughty or nice? Mel B looks fabulous perching on Santa's lap while indulging in festive fun with husband Stephen Belafonte and daughters Madison and Angel**



▶ **Thwor and peace: Chris Hemsworth flashes a friendly V-sign to baying fans as he arrives at TV studio to promote new film in The Heart of the Sea**



▶ **Buxom Charlotte Crosby shows off her ample cleavage and pert posterior as she strips down to skimpy black bikini during beach holiday in Cape**



Verde

▶ **Lady Colin Campbell and Duncan Banntayne 'snub I'm A Celebrity wrap party as their bitter feud continues'**

Rumble in the jungle is far from over



▶ **PICTURE EXCLUSIVE: Kylie Jenner looks leggy in tight black dress as best friend Hailey Baldwin shows off her figure in super short hotpants at Miami party**



▶ **Home and Away and Prisoner actress Maggie Kirkpatrick has her child sex assault conviction and sentence DISMISSED**



▶ **Ruff life! Alex Pettyfer is left carrying large bag of dog food during outing with Marloes Horst... days after he revealed Channing Tatum doesn't like him**



▶ **'Stop selling other people's art!' Cara Delevingne accused of 'stealing' popular The Future Is Female sweater design from independent LA brand**



▶ **Livia Firth is chic in black jumpsuit as her dapper husband Colin offers support at first GCC Global Leaders of Change Awards**

Supportive wife



▶ **Secrets of an A-list body: How to get Naomie Harris's elegant ankles**

We reveal how to get the enviable physiques of the stars



▶ **'I think she's amazing!' Jared Leto changes his tune after saying he 'didn't give a f*** about' Taylor Swift and her music**

New line



▶ **KATIE HOPKINS: The hardest thing about being a woman, Caitlyn Jenner, isn't deciding what to wear - it's deciding which cross to bear**



▶ **Ronda Rousey admits she was 'f***ing sad' about**



shock loss to Holly Holm, and reveals her brutal injuries could take six months to heal
Getting treatment



▶Michelle Dockery is every inch the English rose in stunning lilac coat and white trousers as she joins Downton co-star Allen Leech on Good Morning America



▶'Snuggles with my angel boys!': Rachel Zoe, 44, looks glamorous in big sunglasses and hoop earrings as she holds sons Skyler and Kaius



▶Better send a thank you card! Tyra Banks credits America's Next Top Model with helping reality stars like Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid find success



▶'It's selfish': Katie Price blasts Ronnie Wood for becoming a father aged 68 and attacks his looks... as it emerges his wife is pregnant with twins



▶A Klass act! Myleene proves she can look just as good IN clothes as she sports cute denim dress after sizzling lingerie shoot



Unusually clothed

▶'Eva and Ezzy I love you!': Ryan Gosling gives sweet shout-out to girlfriend Eva Mendes and daughter Esmeralda after giggly SNL appearance



▶Dragons' Den and I'm A Celebrity star Duncan Bannatyne provided false evidence during divorce money fight with his former wife Joanne
Moneygrabber



▶'Ask the next question!' Adam Levine bursts into song to save Gwen Stefani from commenting on relationship with co-star Blake Shelton



▶Scott Disick chats on his phone after taking Kourtney Kardashian to visit baby West... as auntie Khloe also stops by the hospital
Is he back in the fold?



▶Kelsey Grammer



slashes the price of luxury Malibu estate by \$7m as it FINALLY sells for \$13m... four years after he split from ex-wife Camille



► 'Cruel and disgusting!' ITV faces Ofcom probe as more than 500 viewers complain at Ferne McCann eating a huge LIVE spider during the I'm A Celebrity final



► Move over, Kim Kardashian! Now John Stamos bares his cheeky side for Paper Magazine
Showing off his derriere for #Fandemonium issue



► TOWIE's Kate Wright flaunts her incredible figure in a tiny bikini as she showers by the pool while on holiday in Spain with boyfriend Dan Edgar



► Will it be The Donald or Caitlyn Jenner... or the ISIS leader? Time magazine releases names of the eight finalists for 2015 Person of the Year



► Caught on a date! Charlie Hunnam makes rare appearance with girlfriend of eight years Morgana McNelis as they head to Hollywood party



► New couple alert? Nick Cannon, 35, and Nicole Murphy, 47, spotted on dinner date... before shopping for furniture together



► Tamara Ecclestone looks leggy in a pleated mini as she takes excitable daughter Sophia to the launch of new hair collection
Cute as a button!



► Heavily-pregnant Cara Kilbey shows off her blossoming baby bump in black lacy lingerie as she shares sexy Instagram snap
Bumping along nicely



► Louisa Johnson visits her old primary school with X Factor mentor Rita Ora as her campaign for the show final ramps up
Back to her roots



► Never-seen-before clip of Chris Pratt's audition with Dave Bautista for Guardians Of



The Galaxy is released as part of Marvel's Phase 2 Collection



▶ Pamela Anderson goes demure in black as she becomes the guardian of female leopard at animal welfare conference in Moscow



▶ She's a true Belieber! Kendall Jenner blends in with the crowd as she watches close pal Justin Bieber perform at the Jingle Bell Ball
Manged to blend in



▶ 'I would love it if you replaced Piers!': Susanna Reid offers I'm A Celebrity winner Vicky Pattison a presenting role on Good Morning Britain



▶ Are You Being Served? actor Nicholas Smith, who played store manager Mr Rumbold in the classic sitcom, dies aged 81
Cult comedy character



▶ Miranda Kerr stuns in scarlet as she teams a festive red minidress with thigh-high boots at Swarovski light-up ceremony in Shanghai
Flaunted her long legs



▶ 'It's taken me a long time to accept myself': Imogen Anthony, 25, reveals body insecurities... as she shares topless photograph of herself



▶ Cheers to that! Reality star Anna Heinrich rallies stylish girl squad as she dons figure-hugging dress and quaffs champagne at her 29th birthday party



▶ Drop a dress size by Saturday: Brighter skin. Glossier hair. Oodles of energy. The diet to get you in shape for the party season
Beat the bloat



▶ I work out every day. You can't do action movies without being in incredibly good shape: Luke Goss under the microscope



▶ Looking quite all white! Playboy model Bryana Holly



showcases sensational figure... after being pictured with 5 Seconds Of Summer star ex Ashton Irwin



▶ Best of British: Ed Sheeran scores four Grammy nods as he leads the list of Brit nominees including James Bay and Ellie Goulding



▶ Ferne McCann and George Shelley cosy up in sweet snap as they admit to 'falling in love' with each other on I'm A Celebrity Romance in the jungle



▶ 'God is so good': Cancer-stricken Joey Feek cries with joy as she and husband Rory receive their first Grammy nomination for duet If I Needed You



▶ 'It'd be nice if we could Sia!' X Factor viewers left bemused as Australian singer takes to the stage wearing HUGE black-and-white wig



▶ 'He's very hot but it's early days': Little Mix's Jade Thirlwall admits she's dating American singer Jason Derulo Singer reveals new romance



▶ Watch me whip, watch me sleigh! Charlotte Crosby gets into the Christmas spirit with fun festive jumper and thigh-high boots at The Clothes Show



▶ No spoilers! New Star Wars' unprecedented secrecy as most of the actors haven't seen final cut and many didn't even know their co-stars' characters on set



▶ Is Charlotte Rampling set for Oscars glory at 69? Actress scoops LA Film Critics award after landing Hollywood Reporter cover... as buzz for new film grows



▶ 'Thanks everybody!' Kelly Clarkson and Lady Gaga share their joy at receiving Grammy nods as stars react to nominations Cheer and praise



► **Kris Jenner, 60, shows off her youthful figure in black swimsuit and statement necklace as she poses in a pool for LOVE's festive advent calendar**



► **Made In Chelsea's Tiffany Watson and Nicola Hughes get into the festive spirit as they kick back at Winter Wonderland Feeling festive**



► **Gwendoline Christie and co-star Daisy Ridley lead the glamour in new Star Wars: The Force Awakens cast photographs ahead of movie release**



► **Hit me baby one more time! Backing dancer who has worked with the likes of Britney Spears and Beyoncé forges new career as a lingerie-clad martial arts fighter**



► **Caroline Flack arranges flirty dance date with newly single Gaz Beadle as he offers to 'teach her the reverse cowgirl position' Chatted on Twitter**



► **'Fitness plus abs brings women!': Ricky Rayment shows off his newly-buff body after shedding 11lbs in a bid to get lucky with the ladies**



► **Kendrick Lamar leads the Grammy nominations with 11 nods as Taylor Swift and The Weeknd receive an impressive seven each Biggest night in music**



► **Rihanna, Madonna and Lana Del Rey are snubbed by the Grammys (but don't worry, Adele wasn't ignored... she's just not eligible yet)**



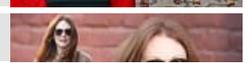
► **A little fall from grace! Miranda Kerr momentarily loses her model poise as she takes a tumble while attempting to slide on a banister**



► **Heaven sent! Victoria's Secret models Behati Prinsloo and Taylor Hill show off their long legs at AOL Build series in NYC**



► **Forever young! Makeup-free**



Julianne Moore looks youthful in aviators and beige coat as she shops in NYC just days after turning 55



▶ Lady C's son Dima brands Duncan Bannatyne an 'a*hole' after entrepreneur unleashes string of angry tweets about former campmate**



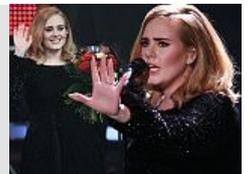
▶ Suki Waterhouse smoulders as she shows off her model credentials in latest shoot for fashion line Express
Rocked series of looks



▶ Jeremy Clarkson 'demanded gravy, cigarettes and Monopoly be delivered to him by helicopter during New Zealand island stay'
Needed essentials



▶ Adele wows in glittering black gown during showstopping performance in Germany after breaking yet another world record
Showstopping set



▶ Want to live between the Beckhams and Simon Cowell? It will cost you £7m! Stunning apartment in London's 'golden postcode' goes on sale



▶ Lisa Snowdon puts on a busty display in figure-hugging 70s-inspired denim jumpsuit as she steps out to host Jingle Bell Ball
She's got good jeans



▶ Bend it like Wills! A suited Prince William shows off his ball skills at a football academy in Birmingham (but he puts it over the bar)
Prince on the pitch



▶ Bond beauty Olga Kurylenko stuns in oriental inspired silk gown as she attends the Marrakech Film Festival
007's leading lady in Quantum Of Solace



▶ Feliz Navidad! Princesses Leonor, 10, and Sofia, 8, take centre stage as the Spanish royal family release their annual Christmas card



▶ **Dublin the fun!**
Mark Wahlberg and Will Ferrell land in Ireland to promote their new film Daddy's Home
Promoting new film together



▶ **A roaring good look: Casey Batchelor wears animal print maxi dress as she heads out for dinner with a friend in Tenerife**
Holiday time



▶ **'It will be a surprise': Princess Sofia and Prince Carl Philip WON'T find out the sex of their first child as they reveal they've practised babysitting royal nieces**



▶ **Arriving in Style!**
Taylor Swift emerges from her private jet after landing in Adelaide ahead of forthcoming show in South Australian capital



▶ **Make-up free Selma Blair sports casual shirt and cropped jeans as she enjoys leisurely outing at farmer's market**
Rocked the casual look



▶ **Va-va-vroom!**
Delta Goodrem stuns in black off-the-shoulder frock with sheer detail at the V8 Supercars Gala Awards
Looked amazing



▶ **Thrilled Lauren Silverman and Eric are re-united with eldest son Adam... hours after break-in at Simon Cowell's home**
Calm after the storm



▶ **Thor blimey! Chris Hemsworth's wife Elsa Pataky, 39, shows her flawless form in racy lingerie as she models for new underwear campaign**



▶ **'Now I crash planes, I don't fly them!' Harrison Ford jokes about solo accident that left him badly injured... and how he still loves being a pilot**



▶ **Amber Heard set to appear in court to fight charges of illegally importing her dogs into Australia - and reveals she is 'looking forward' to clearing her name**



▶ **All fired up!** Susan Sarandon lets her hair down as she puts on an impassioned display at ice hockey match with son Miles
Quality time



▶ **My regret at tawdry TV past:** Vicky Pattison crowned winner of 'I'm A Celebrity' despite her previously controversial image as a wild child who had sex on TV



▶ **VIC-torious!** Vicky Pattison beats George Shelley to be crowned Queen of the Jungle in 'I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!'
Geordie in the jungle



▶ **Kristin Cavallari shares throwback picture of her missing brother and says she remains 'hopeful' after his car was found in the Utah desert**



▶ **'If this was my friend, what are my enemies like?'** Gabi Grecko hits back at Gamble Breaux after RHOM star said hanging out with her was 'detrimental to my character'



▶ **Myleene Klass sizzles as she strips down to her knickers for a saucy underwear shoot to promote her own lingerie line**
Posing up a storm



▶ **Ariel Winter goes make-up free as she shows off her svelte shape in form-fitting black ensemble for low-key outing with a male pal**



▶ **Jaden Smith enjoys romantic stroll on Miami beach with girlfriend Sarah Snyder as his ex Kylie Jenner says she 'respects' their relationship**



▶ **What about Jon Snow? First footage from Game Of Thrones season six reveals emotional Daenerys and Cersei's new do**
Will he return?



▶ **Pippa's EX files:** Miss Middleton and mum Carole are joined by former flame as they support Prince William at carol concert



And it's NOT Nico

▶ **Ronnie Wood set to be a dad again at 68: Rocker's third wife Sally, 37, pregnant with twins**

Sally is said to be around three months pregnant



▶ **Is Vicky now set to make millions? I'm a Celeb winner has 'dozens of offers including beauty endorsements and ITV presenting job'**



▶ **Cheryl Fernandez-Versini wraps up in faux fur coat and over-the-knee boots as she leaves X Factor studios after Reggie N Bollie sailed through to final**



▶ **Nashville star Clare Bowen celebrates engagement after long-time love proposes during a performance at The Grand Ole Opry**



▶ **Rita Ora goes low-key in baggy boyfriend jeans and a striped top as she leaves the X Factor after losing act Lauren Murray**

Ditched racy ensembles



▶ **Baby's first photo shoot! Coco Austin goes topless as she cradles newborn daughter Chanel for sweet snaps**

Coco and husband Ice-T welcomed Chanel



▶ **'I need to move forward': Khloe Kardashian admits love for estranged husband Lamar Odom while pursuing divorce on KUWT K**



▶ **PICTURED: Kris Jenner seen for first time visiting new mom Kim Kardashian... as it's rumored baby boy could be named Robert after reality star's late father**



▶ **Artsy auntie! Kylie Jenner hits the shops in Miami Beach with pal Hailey Baldwin the day after sister Kim welcomes baby boy**

Auntie Kylie!



▶ **Things that go bump in the afternoon! Chrissy Teigen shows off pregnancy curves**



on shopping trip with John Legend
Bumping along nicely



► **Gossip Girl joins the squad! Blake Lively spends day with Taylor Swift at Australian theme park after actress was spotted at singer's concert**



► **Kate Winslet claims being an English actor is like having a 'magical qualification' as she celebrates her award-winning career at special BAFTA event**



► **Carey Mulligan flatters her post-baby body in elegant column gown as she hits the red carpet for British Independent Film Awards**



Looked chic

► **Transgender actress and Andy Warhol muse Holly Woodlawn - who inspired the Lou Reed song Walk on the Wild Side - dies after battle with cancer aged 69**



► **Kristin Cavallari's brother Michael has been missing for ten days after his car was found abandoned off a highway in Utah after apparent accident**



► **The end of an era! Playboy reveals the final model who will pose nude in the magazine's centerfold - 62 years after Marilyn Monroe**
No more naked shoots



► **Back to work! Gavin Rossdale's nanny 'lover' is all smiles at her childcare centre after keeping low profile since star's split from Gwen Stefani**



► **'I wouldn't behave the way she behaved': Natalie Bassingthwaight labels Mel B a 'bad person' over her diva antics on The X Factor Australia**



► **Shirtless Justin Bieber shows off his tattooed torso as he puts on an energetic performance at London's Jingle Bell Ball**
Is he the new Iggy?



► **Disney star Tiffany Thornton's husband Chris**



Carney was seen 'slamming shots before fatal car crash'

Killed tragically following a car crash on Friday



▶Smoking hot! Miley Cyrus lights up onstage as she posts raunchy shot of her underwear from Dead Petz tour

Another day, another outrageous appearance



▶Calvin Harris changes Instagram account to private 'after tiring of fans critical of his relationship with pop star Taylor Swift'

Friends only



▶'They saved the best for last': Kourtney Kardashian FINALLY gets her own app after all her younger sisters launched their own

Finally online



▶Caitlyn Jenner wears plunging top and high heels as she spends quality time with eldest son Burt

Pair spent quality time together



▶Cynthia Bailey says nasty brawl with Porsha Williams brought her closer to husband Peter Thomas on RHOA

Kicked her in stomach at boat party



▶Oscar buzz builds around Brooklyn star Saoirse Ronan, 21, as she collects British Independent Film Award in dazzling mini

Rising star



▶Abbey Clancy and Peter Crouch brave the London chill to enjoy some festive family fun with two daughters Sophia and Liberty

Abbey looked stunning



▶My, how you've changed! Bearded Adam Garcia is a shadow of his former self as he attends gala event...15 years after role in Coyote Ugly



▶Call The Midwife's Helen George is knocked out of Strictly Come Dancing after judges unanimously save Georgia May Foote

She's out!



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