

# commentary

from other pens...

## 1996 attack on planes infect U.S.-Cuba relation

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Five years after Cuban MiGs shot down two unarmed Miami-based private planes north of Cuba, the fallout continues to infect U.S.-Cuban relations, with no sign of any letup. Partly as a result of the Feb. 24, 1996, incident, Washington and Havana have dispensed with even the most elemental courtesies. There is name-calling on both sides, with Cuban President Fidel Castro saying he hopes President Bush is not as “stupid” as he seems and prominent Americans, including Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms, R-N.C., expressing hope death will soon claim Castro, now 74. Fortieth anniversary celebrations in April of the Bay of Pigs invasion are expected to have a pronounced anti-American theme. Also, Cuba has vowed to retaliate for the paring shot that former President Clinton took at Cuba on his last full day in office. He issued an executive order to pay \$96.7 million in frozen Cuban assets to families of three American citizens, all Cuban-Americans, who were killed in the 1996 incident. The funds were derived from long-distance phone service between the two countries.

In Miami, federal prosecutors in a trial of five alleged Miami-based spies for Cuba have presented documents suggesting that the MiG attack was the result of an elaborate plot hatched in Havana.

The planes belonged to Brothers to the Rescue, a Cuban-American group known for efforts to save Cubans attempting to flee the island. But Cuba regards the Brothers as primarily a terrorist organization which has engaged in provocations against the island. It says Cuban agents in Miami who infiltrated the group were merely trying to prevent an attack on their homeland.

Former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick says those responsible for the attack should be indicted. Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., says the “criminal conspiracy” responsible “almost certainly leads to Castro.” Cuba claims the aircraft penetrated Cuban air space. An investigation backed up the U.S. claim the attack occurred in international air space. Clinton’s decision to use frozen Cuban funds to compensate the Brothers’ family members has caused controversy. The Carter administration in 1981 used frozen Iranian assets to cut a deal that freed 52 American hostages held by Iran. Last fall, Congress approved legislation that allowed victims of terrorist attacks to collect damages by attaching foreign nations’ assets in the United States. It stripped a provision included in earlier legislation that enabled the president to block such payments. The \$96.7 million award, which included \$41 million in compensatory damages, was in response to a \$187 million judgment granted to the families by a Miami judge in 1997.

Clinton’s reasons for issuing the Jan. 19 executive order have never been fully explained. He could have dumped the issue in Bush’s lap. Wayne Smith, a Cuba expert and former diplomat who opposed Clinton’s action, said: “There must be a money trail somewhere.” Smith believes if frozen Cuban assets are to be used for compensation, they belong to the many Americans who have property claims or wrongful death suits against Cuba dating back 40 years.

Robert Muse, a Washington lawyer who represents U.S. corporations with claims against Cuba, says Clinton’s action “mocks the concept of equal treatment under the law” because it pushed the Miami relatives of three Cuban-Americans “to the front of a line that formed 40 years ago.” Dennis Hays, another retired Foreign Service officer who is now a high-level official of the anti-Castro Cuban-American National Foundation, says Clinton acted properly. He noted that Clinton showed respect for the will of the Congress.

“This is exactly what the Congress was intent on doing — to put a price on terrorist states. What better way to make the point there is a price when terrorist states kill American citizens.”

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N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services ([nbetz@nwkansas.com](mailto:nbetz@nwkansas.com))  
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. ([support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com))

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## Mothers need their own ‘La-Z-Girl’

Time magazine reports that millions of adult women are being treated for attention-deficit disorder, a condition we have long associated with disruptive, can’t-sit-in-their-seats boys. But doctors say they face an interesting challenge in diagnosing women with ADD because the dysfunctions of the disorder — feeling overwhelmed, disorganized, distracted, scattered — pretty much capture the daily experience of your basic American mother.

The increasing number of ADD diagnoses among women is, in great part, the result of more sophisticated knowledge about the brain. We can pinpoint and treat more neurological and chemical disorders than ever before.

But I can’t help wondering if we’re also “pathologizing” a way of life that needs simplification, not medication. In short, mothers feel overwhelmed and scattered because we try to do too much. The expectations — whether our own or society’s — keep rising. We’re supposed to make cupcakes for the class party, arrange carpools, exercise, keep a clean and pretty house, read stimulating books, produce well-balanced meals, raise moral and competent children, maintain our youthful good looks and pursue a satisfying career. And, by the way, we’re supposed to do all this without having an extended family around to help out.



joan  
ryan

• commentary

No wonder we’re turning to pharmaceuticals. What we need is a cultural revolution like the one fathers underwent some years ago. Fathers were encouraged — and given permission — to be more nurturing and involved in their children’s lives. In other words, they became more like mothers. Now we need to give mothers permission to be more like fathers. A basic difference between men and women is that men allow themselves to rest and women don’t. Men instinctively build recuperation time into their days. As comic Mark Lundholm points out, it’s no mystery why there’s a La-Z-Boy chair but no La-Z-Girl version. Last Saturday, a girlfriend treated me to a spa day. We had massages, sat in the hot tub, then had a long lunch. Spas make their living off women like us, who once or twice a year might indulge themselves in a day of complete relaxation. “Pamper yourself!” ads for bubble bath and specialty coffees say, rec-

ognizing that women count any personal rejuvenation time as “pampering” and a “special occasion.” You don’t see the networks telling men to pamper themselves by spending Super Bowl Sunday in front of the television. You don’t see golf courses running ads that tell guys to pamper themselves by playing 18 holes. They know men don’t need to justify the choice to watch television or play golf. Men seem to recognize the importance of relaxation, an instinct that perhaps dates to prehistoric days when, if a hunter were weak and depleted, he’d become prey. Of course, if women relaxed more often, the house wouldn’t look like Home Beautiful, the kids might not get their daily requirement of vegetables, and maybe there wouldn’t be milk in the fridge. Yes. And we would all manage to get by, perhaps even without a little pill every morning.

I think this movement to get mothers to become more like fathers ought to adopt as its motto those wise words of our nation’s flight attendants: Put your own oxygen mask on first before helping others with theirs. Then everyone would have a better chance at survival. Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her in care of this newspaper or send her e-mail at [joanryan@sfgate.com](mailto:joanryan@sfgate.com).

## What we need is a good looking \$5 coin



steve  
haynes

• along the sappa

Sen. Phil Gramm, the Texan whose name is forever linked to the first law limiting the federal budget, says he wants to improve the quality of American coins, which he says have been dull and lifeless since silver disappeared from their diet. It’s a great idea, but getting everyone to agree on new coins won’t be easy. Sen. Gramm wants, for instance, to keep the present copper penny (actually, copper-plated zinc since 1982) but get rid of the copper-nickel “sandwich” coins, including the present dime and quarter. Vending machine lobbyists would like to see more dollar coins, along with \$2 and \$5 coins to replace paper money in the lower range. They say the sandwich is easy for electronic devices to identify, and should be kept. Retailers want to do away with the penny, which they claim costs more to make and handle than it’s worth. The Senate Banking Committee, which Gramm heads, is considering an overhaul of all U.S. coinage with an eye toward redesigning all the denominations. The chairman hopes new composite met-

als could hold a higher relief and thus provide prettier coins. However, the sandwich coins are easily identified and hard to counterfeit. Inflation — more than 60 percent since 1950, more than 97 percent since 1930, has eaten away at the value of a penny. Merchants think they are a nuisance and people generally don’t value them. Why else would they give them away at store counters? And while Gramm is not on board, it does make sense to look at making the dime or nickel the foundation unit of our currency. Businesses would likely round bills up a penny or two, but who’d notice? At current, depressed prices, you’d think the mint could take the savings from not making pennies and find a way to make better-looking coins.

## Kansas no longer laughing stock to the world

**Olathe Daily News on the State Board of Education:**

The world can stop laughing at Kansas. With a 7-3 vote ... the State Board of Education approved science standards that will bring back evolution as a central theory in the state’s public education curriculum. ... The action taken by the board overturns the standards approved in 1999 that de-emphasized the teaching of evolution. ... Word of the decision became a global issue. Kansas became the butt of national jokes. It suffered the wrath of disgrace at the hands of worldly scholars. At issue in the decision was creationism versus evolution, no matter how much the 1999 board tried to emphasize local control. The majority of the 1999 board members could not bear the thought of schools teaching macro-evolution which theorizes that one species could have evolved from another. For creationists, there is the Bible. For evolutionists, there is some scientific fact ... The theories of creationism and evolution should be taught in public schools. Students should be taught to question the validity of any theory. Only then can they be adequately informed to make up their own minds to what they believe. That is the only way to stimulate the desire to seek the truth in any theory. ... No one knows the answers to man’s origin. And no on should stop man from thinking about all the possibilities.

With the state boards’ decision, those possibilities are now back in the classrooms of Kansas public schools.

**The Ottawa Herald on legislative ethics:**

Proposed changes to the state’s ethics laws that would ban all gifts from lobbyists to members of the House and Senate may have little support from legislators, but should be approved. The proposed change could standardize the way gifts are handled for all government employees. Current law allows gifts from lobbyists to legislators of up to \$40. However, employees in the executive branch are banned from accepting gifts from people or companies with special interest in an agency’s work. Legislators are not highly paid, but gifts from lobbyists shouldn’t be a perk of the job. ... Lobbyists don’t give those gifts just because they like lawmakers, they expect something in return for their generosity. ... Last year, state ethics laws were revised to require lobbyists to report each individual gift, its value and who received it. Few legislators favored the measure. Now, the first year with the new procedures has already produced consternation among some legislators who don’t want their names showing up on lists for receiving any gifts. ... Sen. David Adkins, R-Leawood, introduced a bill to hold legislators to the same restrictions as statewide elected officials and the executive branch. ... Any further ethics reform should go all the way

Silver is cheap, and it could be the basis for those composite metals. Americans have been slow to accept dollar coins, but that’s mostly because there are not many of them out there, and people tend to hoard what they get. The government will have to flood the market to get them into spenders’ pockets, but it could be done. Already, some vending machines use them to make change. And \$2 and \$5 coins make sense in a world where the lowly dollar bill has lost so much of its worth. They’d be convenient and easy to carry. The one thing no one is really talking about yet is who — or what — to put on redesigned coins. Would it be dead presidents, historical figures such as Sacajewea, who appears on the new dollar, or a return to the traditional Lady Liberty? You can bet there’ll be a fight. It should be fun to see what they come up with. One thing is certain, though. By the time Congress decides what to do, the new coins won’t be worth as much as the old ones are today. You can bet on it.

and ban all gifts. Anything less will continue to have some gray areas about what counts and doesn’t count, what should be reported and what shouldn’t be reported.

### berry’s world

