

commentary

from other pens...

Bush: Latin America region has problems

In some ways, Latin America has been more successful than other regions. It is virtually all democratic, there are no significant cross-border or ethnic conflicts, and nobody is trying to build missiles or weapons of mass destruction.

Compare all this with, say, the Middle East, and Latin America looks like it's on a roll.

As President Bush heads for Latin America on Thursday, however, many think the region's roll is more backward than forward.

Latin Americans have been fleeing their homelands in recent years by the hundreds of thousands. Income inequality, a chronic problem, appears to be worsening. The region's third and fourth largest countries — Colombia and Argentina — are in the midst of profound crises. In Venezuela, political polarization is deepening.

Corruption is admitted to be widespread, institutions are weak and faith in democracy is faltering. Economies were stagnant for the most part last year, and only marginal improvements are expected this year.

This will be Bush's first foray into the region since a brief stop in Mexico a month after he took office.

Bush will make a return trip to Mexico on Thursday, traveling to Monterrey for talks with President Vicente Fox and to attend a global development conference. He is expected to reaffirm his commitment to the creation of a hemispheric free trade zone by 2005. He also will publicize a sharp foreign aid increase he recently proposed.

Bush will travel to Peru Saturday and to El Salvador Sunday. At both stops, leaders from neighboring countries will be on hand for meetings.

Bush's previous comments on Latin America were noted for soaring rhetoric and for focusing more on opportunities rather than problems.

Attending a hemispheric summit in Canada in April 2001, he outlined his dream of making this "The Century of the Americas." He said: "We have a great vision before us: a fully democratic hemisphere, bound together by good will and free trade. That is a tall order. It is also the chance of a lifetime."

In the past, culprits for an underperforming Latin America were easy to find: internal strife and dictatorships that cared little for their populations.

Today's culprits are less obvious. Most of the countries have been embracing economic changes advocated by the United States and the International Monetary Fund. These economic overhauls have had little positive impact.

Mark Falcoff, a Latin America expert at the American Enterprise Institute, says it is a mistake to blame the reforms.

He says the crisis of the state persists in much of the region, pointing to underfinanced primary and secondary education, corrupt privatization transactions and a lack of independent judiciary systems.

Public works, education, health and police agencies have been "top-heavy with bureaucrats, which shortchanged services at the end of the line."

He suggests the U.S. and the West have put too much emphasis on the need for fiscal discipline and not enough on good governance.

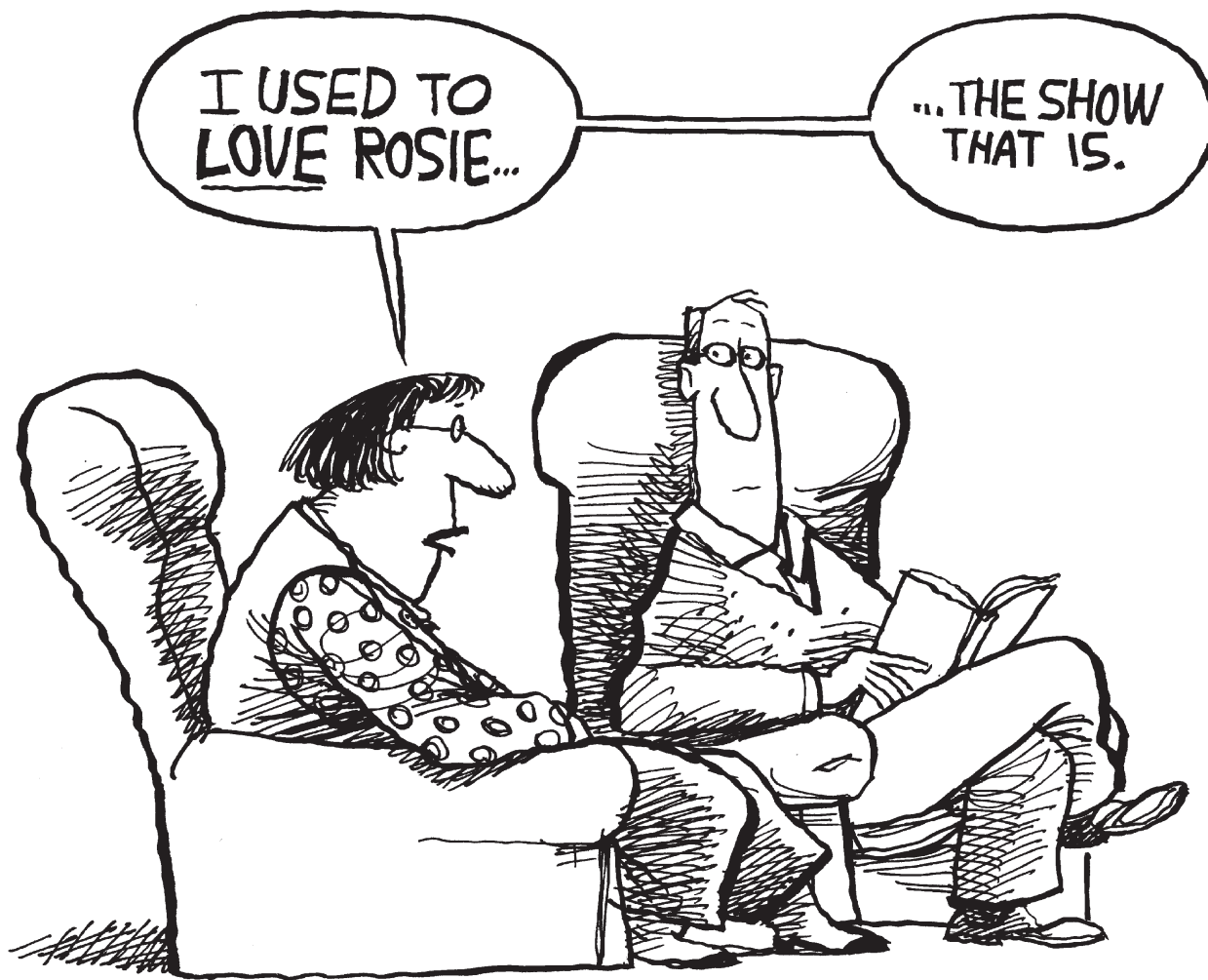
Michael Shifter, who watches Latin America at the Inter-American Dialogue, says that in many Latin American countries, "There is rage and frustration at the inability of the political class to solve problems."

Surveys show that support for democracy is ebbing throughout the region. The Chilean public opinion firm Latinobarometro found last year that pro-democracy sentiment dropped in every country in the region except Mexico between 2000 and 2001.

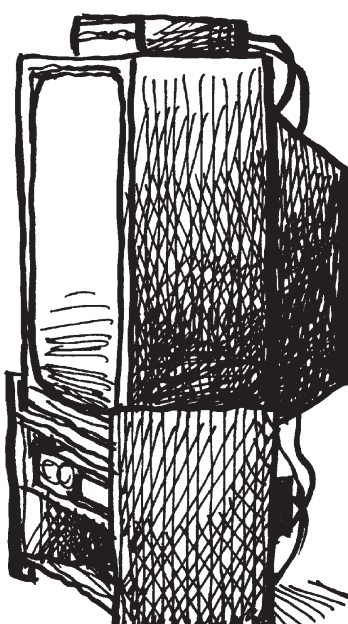
In Mexico, the increase was one point, reflecting the afterglow of an opposition victory in presidential elections for the first time in 70 years.

Still, the reluctance to subvert democratic processes in the region remains strong. There has not been a military coup in a Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking country in the hemisphere since the generals seized power in Argentina in 1976.

EDITOR'S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for *The Associated Press* since 1968.



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Smoking at restaurants fading without laws

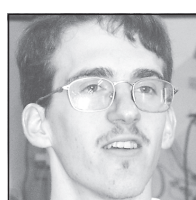
The other night I was at a restaurant in town which still allows smoking.

After my meal, I lit one up, only to have the waitress come over a few minutes later and politely ask me to put it out. She said there was a customer in the restaurant who was deathly allergic to smoke.

It didn't bother me too much, I try to be sensitive to people who can't handle smoke, and the waitress did ask nicely. One of my dinner companions wasn't so thrilled about it, though. She said this was a smoking restaurant, and one of the last left in town. It's one of the reasons we chose to eat there. Our waitress shrugged her shoulders and said it probably wouldn't be for long.

This is a classic case of the free enterprise system at work. The restaurant owner is faced with a choice. Does he, actually, she in this case, continue to let patrons smoke, and lose the business of those who can't stand the effects, or does she ban smoking in the building, possibly losing business from those of us who like a cigarette after a meal?

It's not really a tough decision. If I was the owner, I would immediately ban all smoking. Non-smokers would enjoy their meal more, and I really wouldn't be in fear of losing any business. We



doug stephens

• wisdom from babes

smokers know we are almost social pariahs, and if every food joint in town bans smoking, what are we going to do, boycott them all?

My guess is, within a year or two, there will no restaurant in town, excepting the bars, where smoking will be allowed. This is not necessarily a bad thing; it's probably better for everybody all around.

The amazing thing is, it is happening without government interference. All across the country, cities have passed laws against smoking in bars, restaurants, and public buildings. Some have even outlawed it while walking down the street or driving in a car.

People in Superior, Colo. are not allowed to smoke at a restaurant, even on an outside patio. In Mesa, Ariz., if a person is caught running a red light on camera, and has a cigarette in his mouth, he is given two tickets. One for the traffic violation and one for the smoking.

A state of mind



red green

• north of forty

I've heard it said that age is a state of mind. Well, so is insanity. Age is a state of body. Our minds can take advantage of arrested development, but our bodies remain at large, armed and dangerous, careening the getaway car headlong into old age and infirmity. In our society, if you're not young, you're old. You'd better get ready for it. Some day soon you'll be riding a bus, and that pretty young thing that you've been sneaking a peek at will get up and offer you her seat. You better take it, because when that happens, you're going to need one. Now don't go nuts and run out and buy a red Ferrari or something. If you truly need a car, make it something conservative and normal. A Ferrari is a mid-life crisis, what you need is a mid-life Chrysler. Embrace the autumn of your life. If you don't, you're riding for a fall.

THE DOOR TO CHAOS

My wife received an unusual and anonymous gift for Christmas — a beautiful antique doorknob for our front door. I installed it on New Year's Eve so we could have a fresh start with a new doorknob — it's way easier than keeping resolutions. By Jan. 2, my wife noticed that the lamp and wall sconces in our front hall looked pretty cheap compared to the new doorknob and, as luck would have it, more suitable lamps and wall sconces were on sale at our local furniture store. Once we got those in place,

the hall was looking great, but the living room seemed kind of shabby by comparison. That was two months ago. We have replaced almost all of the furniture and carpeting in the living room, dining room and throughout our whole house. I get an uneasy feeling every time I come home. That's because I have to go through our front door. I hate that doorknob — the free gift that cost us a fortune. And, we have no idea who sent it to us. I'm guessing it was the furniture store.

THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO ALONE

- Go to a boat show.
- Attend happy hour.
- Try a home barber kit.
- Talk to the arresting officer.
- Spend time with your in-laws.
- Anything on your honeymoon.

OUTDOORS IS NOT IN

A lot of you guys out there could probably ben-

Here we don't need these laws. We do it to ourselves. That is the way it should be. I'm not fond of not being able to smoke after a meal, but it is the price of going out and not having to worry about the dishes. I'm not a fanatic about it.

Free enterprise at work can be a wonderful thing. I can see a situation where an enterprising restaurateur would notice a vacuum, and decide he would open up a restaurant where smoking was encouraged. You know, hostesses walking around with cigars and cigarettes on trays, posters of Joe Camel on the wall, life-size wax replica of the Marlboro man greeting customers, the works.

It wouldn't work, at least here. Aside from the tackiness involved in such a picture, non-smokers would avoid it like an invitation to dine with Mike Tyson. Employees would be hard to find. All that blue haze would be horrible on the ceiling paint.

If such a place opened up, I might go. I'd want to see what it was like anyway, but if the food wasn't any good, I wouldn't go back. Eating out at a restaurant is about that, eating out.

When the waitress asked me to put out my smoke, I didn't have too big a problem with it. Pretty soon, I'm going to be asked to put it out permanently when I go out to eat.

efit from my experience. That's a nice way of saying that in the River of Time, I'm a little farther up the creek than you. Now, I bet that you still think of yourself as that virile outdoorsy guy you were 20 years ago, but I'm here to tell you that is no longer the case. As the years have passed, Nature has been taking its course, but you haven't been keeping up with the curriculum. Heading out into the wilderness at your age is just asking for trouble. Remember how you used to grab the old knapsack before hiking up the mountain? Now you need to grab a nap in the sack before hiking up your pants. Was the last white water you were in from spilling your Bromo in the Jacuzzi? And when's the last time you saw your hiking boots? Heck, when's the last time you saw your feet? Forget the wilderness. Would you rather leave your home and spend the day in the remote wilderness like your forebearers? Or, would you spend the day at home with the remote and leave the wilderness for bears? Just settle into your Barcalounger, tune in to National Geographic and enjoy the natural disasters in total comfort. At our age, we don't need high adventure, we need high fiber. And, if you eat enough oat bran, you may get both.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "You know you've reached middle age when your back goes out more often than you do." — Red Green

Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."

Salute to women's history month

WASHINGTON, DC—Since 1919, Business and Professional Women/USA has been, influential in shaping the course of women's history. Business and Professional Women/USA commemorates Women's History Month by saluting the efforts and contributions of women to America's society.

"Business and Professional Women has been at the forefront of the women's movement, beginning with suffrage in the 1920s to current issues of work-life balance and workplace equity," said National President Leslie R. Wilkins. "As the first national association for business and professional women, Business and Professional Women/USA continues to be instrumental in educating lawmakers and influencing legislation and policies to resolve the issues of working women and their families."

Its rich history includes women who made "firsts" in elected and appointed government positions: State Supreme Court Justices, Governors (including Ann Richards), Congresswomen, Mayors and federal appointees (including Janet Reno). Business and Professional Women's National Presidents have played key roles, from Dr. Minnie C. Miles, who was instrumental in passage of the Equal Pay Act and received a pen that John F. Kennedy used to sign the act into law, to Judge Sarah T. Hughes, who administered the oath of office to Johnson after assassination of John. F. Kennedy. Noted Business and Professional Women members included First Lady Mamie



from our readers

• to the editor

Eisenhower, who became the 1,000th member of Business and Professional Women's DC Local Organization, and First Ladies Pat Nixon, Bess Truman, Rosalyn Carter and Hillary Clinton.

Business and Professional Women continues its efforts to bring national recognition of women not only in March, but year-round, with signature events like the premier Arc-round Conference on work-life balance in February, Equal Pay Day in April, and National Business Women's Week in October. Yet, despite the valuable and historic contributions women have made to society, gender inequality still exists.

"Women currently earn 73 cents to every man's dollar. Studies show that a wage gap not only exists, but it has widened," said CEO Dr. Jane E. Smith. "Business and Professional Women/USA will continue to advance the status of working women everywhere, beginning with calling attention to pay equity in April," said Dr. Smith. Giselle Pole Washington, D.C.

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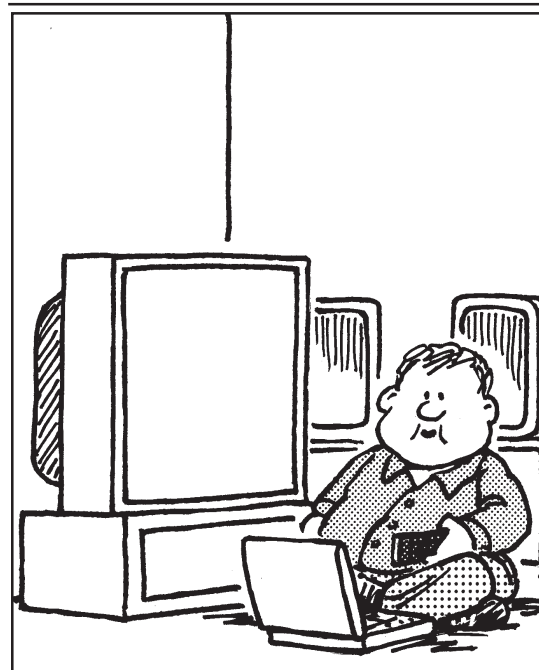
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