

# commentary

from other pens...

## Voice of America spreads U.S. message

Newton Minow, a former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, complained not long ago that Voice of America broadcasts to the Middle East were so ineffectual they amounted to "barely a whisper."

"Virtually no one listens," he said. That may be changing with the advent of Voice of America's Middle East Radio Network, which went on the air March 23 with the avowed aim of getting the ear of Arabs from Morocco to Oman.

The AM-FM station is known in the region as "Radio Sawa," which means "Radio Together" in Arabic. Through the use of modern marketing techniques, Sawa seeks to lure the majority younger population of the region with music while also giving them news that doesn't sound much like the anti-American tirades they're accustomed to hearing on Arab stations.

The music features American favorites such as Jennifer Lopez and the Back Street Boys — and Arab pop stars from Egypt, Lebanon and other countries.

"Music is a tool," says Norman Pattiz, a member of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the government entity that oversees U.S. foreign broadcast operations. The target audience is 25 and under. The best way to reach them is with music."

If music is the bait, the main dish for listeners, as the U.S. government sees it, is the airing of U.S. policy. When Secretary of State Colin Powell was traveling through the Middle East last week, Sawa fans got to hear his words just minutes after he spoke them.

Next week, Sawa will begin broadcasting policy reports, editorials and reviews and critiques of Arab press reports.

Sawa is on the air 24 hours a day, much like Al-Jazeera, a Qatar-based satellite TV channel that is the main source of news in the Arab world. Minow calls Al-Jazeera the favored news outlet of terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden and Afghanistan's deposed Taliban.

Planning for Sawa started well before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. From the American perspective, its debut came at a fortuitous time, given the decline in American standing in the Arab world.

Demonstrations against both Israel and the United States have been on the increase amid intensified fighting between Israelis and Palestinians.

Sawa also is reinforcing the administration's post-Sept. 11 stand that the war on terrorism is not directed at Muslims.

A quote from President Bush heard on Sawa: "We're not fighting against Islam, we're fighting against terrorists. Those who commit evil in the name of Allah, blaspheme Allah."

Winning Arab public opinion has been an administration objective since American bombs began dropping on Afghanistan in early October.

Officials consulted advertising executives and other experts to devise ways to get America's message across. Toward that end, Powell and other officials made frequent use of al-Jazeera.

Pattiz, founder and chairman of Westwood One, America's largest radio network, believes dissemination of the message should be an all-day, everyday challenge.

When Pattiz took his seat on the board in November 2000, Voice of America's Arabic service was mostly a short wave operation. Pattiz said the signal emanating from a Mediterranean island was audible mostly in the evenings in coastal regions. He described the effort as anemic.

Based on his business career, Pattiz says it's always best to "underpromise and overdeliver."

His exuberance for his new project is unbridled as he contemplates all those young Arabs dialing up Radio Sawa.

"We are going from almost zero to creating something I believe can have tremendous impact in less than a year," he says.

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



## Bosses, not babies, at issue

I felt I had slipped into a wormhole that dumped me back in 1972. Last week's Time magazine cover carried a black-and-red banner headline, as if promoting an upcoming Las Vegas fight: "Babies vs. Career."

This was followed by the remarkable sub-headline: "Which should come first for women who want both? The harsh facts about fertility?"

The harsh facts about fertility? How about the harsh facts about the workplace?

The Time story is a take-off on economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett's intriguing new book, "Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children." Hewlett conducted a nationwide survey that reinforced previous studies and first-hand observations in our own offices: The higher a woman's position in a corporation, the less likely it is that she is to have children.

Among 40-year-old professionals earning \$100,000 a year or more, for example, 49 percent of women had no children compared to just 19 percent of men.

Hewlett's book is a wide-ranging examination of the phenomenon, but the message emerging from the media, from "60 Minutes" to every major newspaper in the country, is that women have (once again) made bad choices in their lives. They are guilty of hubris for counting on fertility technology to make them mothers in middle age. They messed up by waiting too long, and now they're sad and regretful.

You know why so many high-achieving women have no children? It isn't their bodies that have betrayed them, but their bosses.

Here we are in the year 2002, and the United



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States remains the most backward of the industrialized nations in fostering balance between family and work. In 21st-century America, a place of gaudy reverence for family values, we still see child-rearing as an individual problem rather than a societal one.

"It's been more than a century since we've had a national-policy discussion about society's responsibility in raising its children," said UC Berkeley Dean of the Graduate Division Mary Ann Mason, referring to the establishment of public schools in the late 1800s.

Mason recently completed a study of men and women who became parents within five years of earning their doctorate degrees in the sciences. After 12 to 14 years in academia, 24 percent fewer of the women at four-year universities earned tenure as compared to the men. In the humanities and social sciences, the gap is 20 percent.

Viewed from another angle, 12 to 14 years after earning doctorates, 62 percent of women who achieve tenure in the humanities and social sciences and 50 percent of the women in the sciences do not have children.

"We seem stuck on the idea that we only provide help and care to the poor, that everyone's on their own when it comes to raising children," said Ma-

son. "We're not only making it difficult to raise civic citizens, but what an incredible loss of social capital (when so many women have to leave the workplace when they become mothers)."

In a study several years ago of women who graduated with an MBA from Harvard University between 1971 and 1981, 25 percent had left the workplace entirely by the 1990s. In another study, researchers looked at male and female MBAs who had risen to within three levels of the CEO position. They found that 84 percent of the men had children compared to just 49 percent of the women.

In many other countries, women don't have to choose between their children and their careers. Throughout much of Europe, mothers receive most of their salary during their child's first year of life. Until the child is 8, parents in Sweden have a statutory right to work an 80-percent schedule. In the Netherlands, workers have the right to a four-day week. In most of these countries, the government subsidizes childcare.

Instead of talking about fertility, let's talk (finally) about transforming the workplace. If women could become mothers in their 20s and 30s without risking their careers, they wouldn't be waiting until their 40s. But they need maternity leave. They need flexible hours for school meetings and homework. They need help with childcare. They need the option of part-time work with pro-rated benefits.

In other words, women don't need the next generation in fertility drugs but the next generation in workplace legislation.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

## Must find new ways to let Congress know wishes

Forget what you've always been told. Don't write your congressman.

Not if you want your message to be read before the vote on whatever you're so excited about.

No one likes to admit it, but more than six months after the Sept. 11 attacks, half a year after the first anthrax letter, Congress isn't getting its mail. At least, not in time to do anything with it.

Travis Murphy, press secretary for Rep. Jerry Moran, says aides are telling people to call, fax or e-mail their messages. It's hurting the Postal Service, but Congress will deal with the postal deficit when it comes around.

Everything that comes into the congressional office buildings has to be diverted for treatment, chemicals or radiation, since the anthrax scare. In Washington, it's no joke.

Mr. Murphy says the mail does come through eventually, but staffers generally are telling people to bypass the post office.

In Sen. Pat Roberts' office, they have a sample "treated" letter posted on the wall. It looks as if it had been toasted.

Fortunately, visitors don't have to go through the same treatment. Security at the doors is tighter than before, though, and the tunnels connecting the



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office buildings and the Capitol are closed, even to members. Your senator has to walk across the street just like everyone else.

Leroy Towns, administrative assistant to Sen. Roberts, says they sometimes have people send overnight packages to a staffer's home. Since these come from a known source, no one is too worried about them.

In the Hart Building, where both Kansas senators have their offices, there is a sense of normalcy now. After months of working in rented space or at home, communicating by e-mail and cell phone, the staffs are back in the anthrax-tainted building. Back to the government phones and shiny marble columns.

Looking around, you'd never know they'd been gone. Actually you feel pretty safe in the Hart building, considering all the chlorine that's been

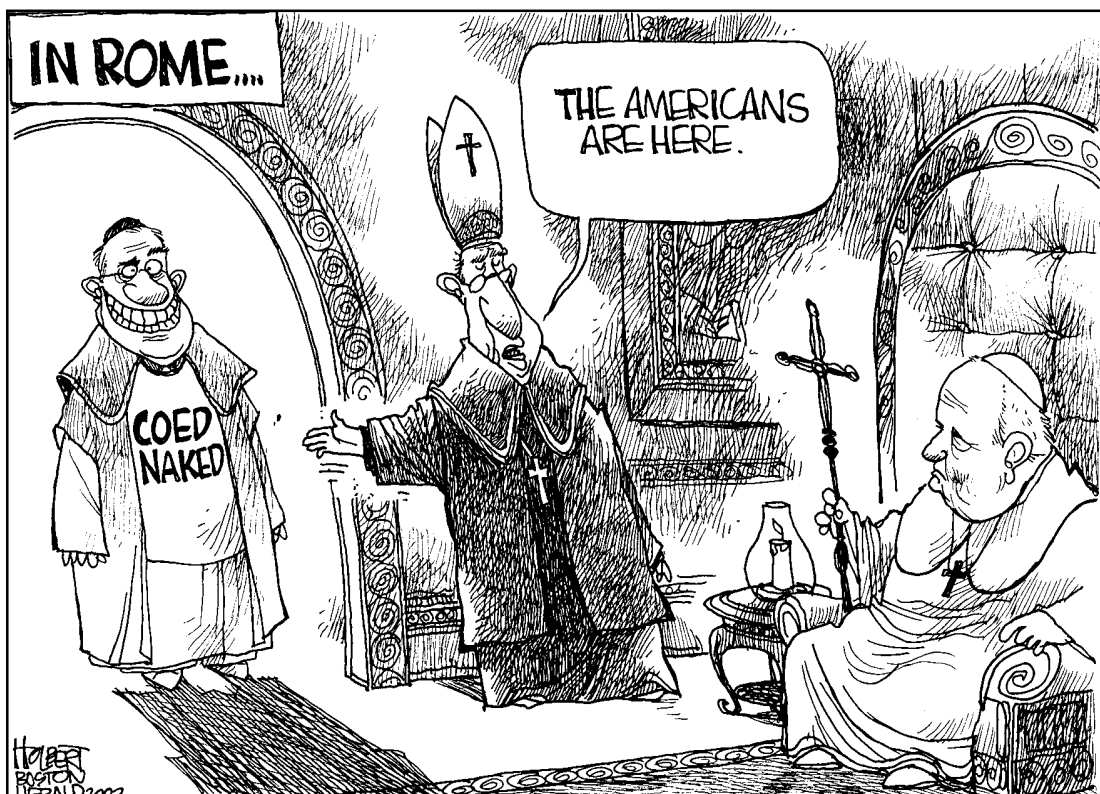
pumped into it. A visitor, looking up and down the grand lobby, wondered who came in to water the potted figs while the building was closed. Maybe gardeners in moon suits.

The trees are fine now. The offices look as though they've been in use all along. The frisk at the door is nothing more than ordinary these days.

But things aren't quite back to normal, not yet, and it may be a while before Congress gets its mail on time.

If you need to get through, here are some contacts:

- Sen. Pat Roberts, phone (202) 224-4774, fax (202) 224-3514, e-mail, <http://www.senate.gov/~roberts/email.htm>
- Sen. Sam Brownback, phone: (202) 224-6521, fax (202) 228-1265, e-mail, <http://www.senate.gov/~brownback/email.htm>
- Rep. Jerry Moran, phone (202) 225-2715, fax (202) 225-5124, e-mail [jerry.moran@mail.house.gov](mailto:jerry.moran@mail.house.gov) or <http://www.house.gov>.



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