

Woman legislator walks a fine line in Arab nation

Najla Faisal Al Awadhi is good. Very good. Meeting a group of American editors, she circulates around the room, handing out her card and taking theirs. Looking each one in the eye, she takes the card, speaks their given name and goes on to the next.

A half hour later, deep in conversation with an inquisitive group, she begins calling us by our first names. Strikingly beautiful in the traditional black robe worn by many women here, she balances a career as an executive of the Dubai state television station with a seat on the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, a budding parliament.

She is one of nine women in the new council, of which 20 seats were chosen by about 1,000 voters in an electoral college and 20 appointed by rulers of the seven emirates. (She was appointed by the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who also served as vice president, or prime minister, in the federal government.)

Ms. Al Awadhi explains that the council, established with the federal



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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government 35 years ago, underwent reorganization last year. In this new phase, the first elections brought new members and a new influence in federal affairs, though the council can only question and amend laws. Power still resides with the Supreme Council, made up of the sheikhs, or rulers, of the seven emirates, and ministers appointed by them.

"We are proud of our role," she says, noting that the tiny nation on the Persian Gulf faces many challenges, not the least of which is its dependence on foreign labor.

"We have to move aggressively in terms of human capital," she says. "We don't want to keep depending on foreign labor (which makes up 80 percent of the population today).

"We really want to focus on 'emirization.' I would stress that education is the key."

The two largest emirates, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, have a solid strategy for development and diversification out of an oil-fueled economy, she said, and the goal is to move the other five states up to their level.

"As a nation, we are only 35 years old," she says. "We believe in gradualism."

The native-born population has a high rate of college education, she said, with 60 to 70 percent going on to post secondary education, including many more women.

"We as women have to prove ourselves more," she says. "We're erasing a lot of myths about women."

She counts herself as lucky, since her family encouraged her to travel — she majored in history at the University of New Hampshire — and because the attitude toward women is more liberal here.

"Across the border in Saudi Arabia," she notes, "women can't

even drive. You can have all the oil in the world, and if you don't have enlightened leadership, what happens?"

She calls herself a practicing Muslim, adding that she does not mind wearing the black robes.

"It's my heritage," she says. "Our understanding of scripture is based on interpretation. The Islam that you found under the Taliban is not my view of Islam. We are tolerant. It has a lot to do with leadership.

"We don't see anything in Islam that restricts us from progress. We didn't have to fight for our rights as women; it was given to us."

Still, notes Ms. Al Awadhi, it's not a perfect world. Schools are segregated by sex and in the business world, single women have a tough time meeting eligible men in a "respectable" setting. Many remain single, as she has. Polygamy is the law.

"When it follows the regulation Islam puts on it," she adds, "then it is fine. I think men sometimes pick and choose what they want.

"The mindsets of the legal system are inclined to favor the rights of men."

In business, she is deputy chief executive officer of the Dubai Media Group. In politics, she thinks she is part of something special, though not yet a legislature.

"We're not looking for democracy in the Western sense," she says, "but something that will fit our culture.

"We're taking an entity that used to be called a Department of Information and remaking it. We inherited a lot of inefficiencies that exist in government in the Third World.

"We are reforming the company and creating great television. Media in the Gulf countries is very new."



ONE OF NINE WOMEN in the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, Najla Faisal Al Awadhi talked with American editors about her country, the rights of women and the budding legislature. — Herald staff photo by Steve Haynes

* Road getting surface

(Continued from Page 1A)

county line to Oberlin, though, it's due for resurfacing next year, with the contract to be let this fall.

In town, a city-state project is replacing the pavement from near The Gateway turnoff to Penn Avenue with new concrete and asphalt. Crews are working on the north half of the concrete now, plan to do the south half next and then replace the asphalt on the east end of the job. The roadway will be two foot wider than today when the job is done, with all-new concrete curbs.

East of Norton, the surface is mostly new to the county line. East of Phillipsburg, crews put down a two-inch asphalt overlay to the Smith County line earlier this summer. The \$1.7 million job was finished last month, Mr. McDiffett said.

The only section in future plans, after the department's 10-year highway program expires in 2009, is widening of the six miles or so east of Norton to the K-383 junction. There's no money and no date yet for that job.

East of the Smith County line, the department overlaid 11 miles to K-128 this summer for \$800,000. From there to Mankato, crews are in the middle of a \$5.4 million rebuilding, with wider shoulders and safer slopes. Next summer, the 8.76 miles east of Mankato will get a similar treatment. In Mankato, the department is replacing curbs and resurfacing, while in Washington, a joint project will widen the K-15 intersection.

East of there 9.2 miles to the four-lane west of Marysville, a \$1 million overlay will smooth the road. Don Drickey, district engineer in Salina, said that should bring most of the route into good condition.

* Alumni push list

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it is. What can be done to the entrance in the meantime? asked Mrs. Olson.

Other than that, she said she is all for the idea of putting the high school on the state historical registry.

Pete Zander, with the alumni association, said he thought teaching the kids about the heritage of the area and the importance of this building might be part of the board's educational mission.

Mr. Zander said he wants to see the board be able to do the work at the building, but would like to see it on the registry.

Board President Dewayne Jackson said the board did have a plan and needs to keep moving on projects.

After the questionnaire is filled out, the Historical Society does an assessment, said Mr. Anderson. At that time, they can tell the board if it can go ahead with the steps or if that will mess up the historical nomination. It might be as easy as a phone call to ask what can and can't be done, he said.

During the research process, he added, they can use hundreds of pictures taken during the construction of the school that were donated to the county museum.

The time to do the steps is in the summer when school is out, said Mrs. Olson, but maybe they can hold off a year. She said she doesn't know.

Mr. Anderson suggested the association get an application into the Heritage Trust Fund, which gives grants for buildings on the registry. That way it will be in when the school receives the nomination.

Board Member Monte Moore said he thinks the project should be pursued.

Superintendent Pat Cullen said he is concerned about the safety of the entrance, but maybe the association can check into what can and can't be done to the steps with a phone call and come back to the meeting in August.

Board Member Dan Grafel agreed, saying they should call the state about the steps.

Rodeo fans to wear pink

The first performance of the 2007 Phillipsburg Rodeo on Thursday, Aug. 2, has been designated "Tough Enough to Wear Pink" night to raise awareness of breast cancer.

For every fan who wears pink to the rodeo that night, \$1 will be donated to the Phillips County Relay for Life. Brooke Corp., which markets insurance franchises, insurance brokerage and lending services through its subsidiaries, will match the rodeo's contribution, dollar for dollar. Brooke is headquartered in Overland Park with a campus in Phillipsburg.

Cowboy and cowgirl competitors will be encouraged to wear pink as they compete and NTV television personalities will be on hand to distribute pink items to fans. The rodeo grounds are two miles north of Phillipsburg. For details visit www.kansasbiggestrodeo.com. Rodeo performances will run from Thursday, Aug. 2, through Saturday, Aug. 4.

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