

Party Lines: *people, places and politics*

Healing for Africa prime mission at dinner

BY KEVIN CHAFFEE

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“I came by to say ‘hi.’” A foreign envoy can hear no sweeter words, especially when they are uttered in his own home by the president of the United States.

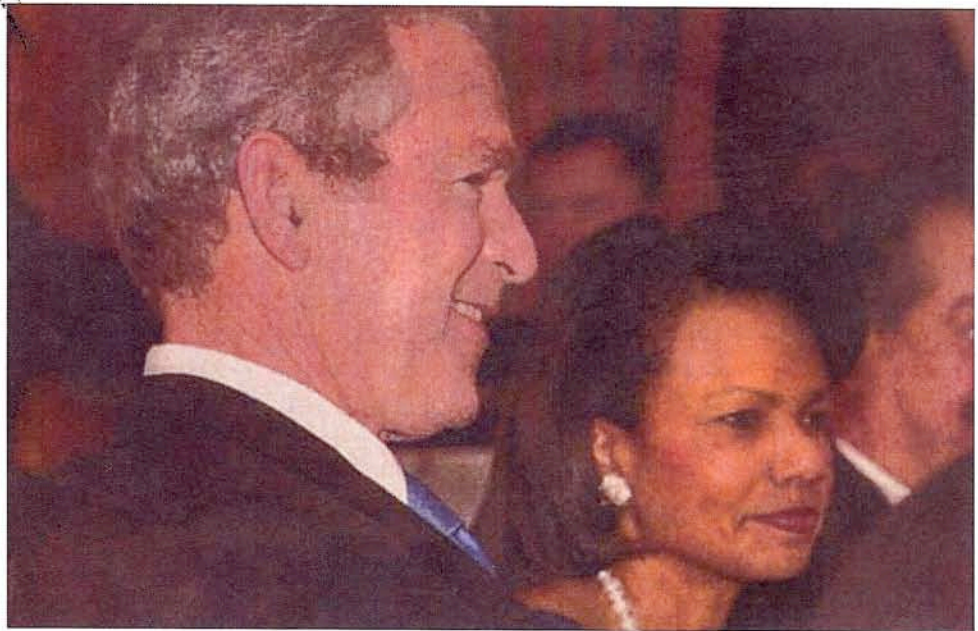
A diplomatic “coup sans pareil” to be sure, and Kuwaiti Ambassador **Salem Al-Sabah** could hardly be faulted for beaming as he escorted the “special good friend” of his nation to the podium at the Kuwait-America Foundation’s Stand for Africa dinner at his official residence on Wednesday night.

“You’ve got a beautiful place here,” President **Bush** said as he surveyed the mosaic-tiled fountain and pool, elaborate wall carvings and primo floral arrangements before playfully apologizing for being late.

“Sorry, but Laura had me watching ‘Father of the Bride,’” he told the crowd with a fib-telling wink. (Truth be told, he was on his way to the National Republican Congressional Committee’s fundraiser at the Washington Hilton and wouldn’t be staying long enough to dine alongside his wife, **Laura**, Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** and other VIPs.)

Still basking in the glow of his successful visit to five African nations last month, Mr. Bush warmed to the task of addressing the evening’s cause: the war on malaria in sub-Saharan parts of that continent.

“There is nothing more tragic than a young baby dying because of a mosquito bite,” he said, noting that the U.S. is still “wealthy, strong and good enough to take on a few problems here and in the rest of the world.”



President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice attended the Kuwait-America Foundation’s Stand for Africa dinner celebrating efforts to eliminate malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. [Photo by James R. Brantley/The Washington Times]

Our nation’s ideological enemies, he added, “have a vision of life that is dark, dim and degrading.... and they can’t possibly succeed unless they find a hopeless situation”

Mr. Bush commended the Kuwait-America Foundation for assisting Malaria No More, a nonprofit grass-roots initiative that works in partnership with his own President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI), a five-year, \$1.2 billion effort to spread awareness about the disease and help those who suffer from it in 15 of the hardest-hit African nations.

Earlier, Mrs. Bush reminded guests that the nation’s capital had been considered a hardship post for diplomats until malaria finally was eradicated in the 1950s. “With systematic effort, it can be eradicated elsewhere,” she said before recalling personal efforts to provide medication and hand out bed nets in Mozambique, Mali, Tanzania and Zambia over the course of several African visits.



Kuwaiti Ambassador Salem Al-Sabah (right photo) and his wife, Rima, welcomed first lady Laura Bush at the entrance to their official residence. [Vicky Pombo/The Washington Times]

With both the president and the first lady in attendance, the event was something of a command performance for top administration officials, including Secretary of Commerce **Carlos Gutierrez**, Secretary of

Education **Margaret Spellings** (who missed the final night of "American Idol" to be there), White House honchos **Joshua B. Bolten** and **Stephen J. Hadley**, Office of Management and Budget Director **Jim Nussle** and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. **Michael G. Mullen**. Also spotted: Justice **Samuel A. Alito Jr.**; Sen. **Robert Bennett**; House Republican Whip **Roy Blunt**; D.C. Mayor **Adrian M. Fenty**; **Meryl Chertoff**, wife of Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff; composer **Marvin Hamlisch**; and ever-youthful actress **Bo Derek**.

"It's like a 'mini Davos,'" Mr. Al-Sabah's wife, the glamorous Sheika **Rima Al-Sabah**, said, noting the presence of business leaders who were thanked for contributing more than \$1.2 million to the foundation in the past year.

Big Oil company representatives from Chevron, Kuwait Petroleum, ExxonMobil, Shell, BP and Marathon spoke of contributing much of the total but remained reticent whenever the words "\$110 a barrel" were mentioned. Asked during cocktail hour what he might say if he had a moment with the president, one oilman shrugged off the question to focus upon a tray of passing kibbeh.

"They don't have anything to ask Bush now," said an insurance executive standing nearby. "But this room is full of talk about issues they're going to have to deal with after he leaves."

Shepard W. Hill, president of Boeing International, said it would be "poor form" to speak to Mr. Bush about his company's recent loss of a \$100 billion contract for air-to-air refueling tankers to rival Northrop Grumman. What if Mr. Bush brought up the subject himself? "I'd tell him I think the Air Force made a mistake."

After guests tucked in to smoked salmon and caviar, mushroom and foie gras soufflé, Colorado lamb chops and

"Le Kit Kat" hazelnut chocolate mousse, **Youssou N'Dour's** traditional Senegalese folk mbalax tunes got the room hopping - hopping for Washington, that is.

"You're not in the White House. Feel it," the faed singer commanded, waving his arms in a great arc, then clapping his hands to inspire the audience to join in.

Justice Alito was spotted clapping, albeit briefly; Mr. Gutierrez, too (it's that Latin blood). **Charlie Rose**, the evening's emcee, joined in; even **Karl Rove**. Definitely not clapping: 27-term dean of the House of Representatives **John D. Dingell**.

"Use that to start waking up the president," Mr. Rose told Mrs. Bush after Mr. N'Dour presented her with a richly decorative native drum.

All in all, it was one of the liveliest nights on Embassy Row since ... well, since the Al-Sabahs' last major party

"Causes are so important, and they know how to make a difference," former Ecuadorean Ambassador **Ivonne A-Baki** said of her hosts' legendary social and networking skills. "They know how to put all the right people together, and that's what makes them special."

Mr. Al-Sabah deflected all praise, calling it "a rare honor" and "a very big deal" to have the president as his



Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour (above at right) and his musicians performed traditional mbalax songs for the assembled guests at dessert time.



Michelle Fenty (below left), wife of D.C. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty, chatted with Edilia Gutierrez (center), wife of Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, and Nancy Bagley, editor in chief of Washington Life magazine. [Photos by James R. Brantley/The Washington Times]

guest, especially because Mr. Bush has visited few embassies during his seven years in office. (Queen Elizabeth II's dinner and a birthday party for Miss Rice at the British ambassador's residence come to mind.)

"It shows how dearly he holds Kuwait," Mr. Al-Sabah said."