



# Q&A

BY TIM EIGO

## With Ambassador Harriet “Hattie” Babbitt

*Hattie Babbitt is familiar with the halls of power. This Arizona lawyer has served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States and as the deputy administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). And she developed important ties when her husband served as Arizona governor and as Interior Department secretary. Now, she has rejoined Robbins & Green, PA, in Phoenix, her old stomping grounds. As the firm celebrated its 30th anniversary, we caught up with its newest D.C.-based partner.*

**ARIZONA ATTORNEY:** What brings you back to Robbins & Green?

**HATTIE BABBITT:** They have developed a nice international practice, and I have spent the last 10 years in Washington very much enmeshed in international issues.

When I left here, I went to the State Department and spent four years as ambassador to the OAS, all focused on Latin America.

Since then, it's been a more global focus. That combines nicely with their relatively new emphasis on their international practice.

**AZAT:** What will you be doing for the firm?

**BABBITT:** My set of relationships is in Washington, so to the extent that those relationships can be useful to clients here, it will be a mutually supportive kind of thing.

**AZAT:** You and the firm go way back.

**BABBITT:** I joined Robbins & Green, I think as their first associate, in January of 1974 and practiced with them for 19 years, until I went to Washington in January 1993. I tried many cases as a trial attorney here.

**AZAT:** Was it the firm that originally brought you to Arizona?

**BABBITT:** I came to Arizona because I had met my husband on an airplane, and we had met in airports for years. When it came

time to get together geographically, he was practicing in Phoenix. So I moved to Phoenix, and didn't have anything to do, so I went to law school. I had an international interest, but not a legal interest. And now they have to a certain extent been combined.

**AZAT:** You met Bruce Babbitt on an airplane?

**BABBITT:** Yes. We were just seated together, two standbys in the sky. It was a Braniff flight from Dallas to Austin. I always thought that if times got hard, we could sell our story to Braniff, but times got hard for Braniff first.

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**AZAT:** Recent events have immersed you in Iraq issues.

**BABBITT:** Yes. I run the Washington office of a foundation [Hunt Alternatives Fund] that has as one of its major programs a thing called “Women Waging Peace.” It is a network of women who work in conflict areas around the world. We have women from 20 different conflicts. And we began for obvious reasons to begin to look at Iraq very seriously in the spring [of 2003]. We identified and brought to Washington about 25 Iraqi women to work on what Iraqi reconstruction should look like in terms of including women.

**AZAT:** If Women Waging Peace is successful, why is it successful?

**BABBITT:** Women [often] are working in some nontraditional way, working for some common interest as opposed to underscoring the ways they disagree.

**AZAT:** How is the Iraqi post-conflict situation different from others in which you've been involved?

**BABBITT:** In the phrase that folks use, “We own Iraq,” “We bought Iraq,” whatever the unhappy phrase is. It was different for me in a variety of ways. One, I wasn't involved in any of the planning, only the aftermath. You just have to decide whether you're going to say, “I so disapprove of the way we went in that we're not going to work in the reconstruction.” Or you're going to say, “I disapprove of the way we went in, but we need to succeed; I can help this be successful, and here's how we can help.” That's the route we chose.

**AZAT:** As an American, do you feel more of a moral imperative because we “own Iraq”?

**BABBITT:** I am deeply conflicted about Iraq because of the circumstances under which we went in. But I am clearly on the side of trying to make it work. It would be very bad for the United States to fail in Iraq.

**AZAT:** You're committed to working with those who can make decisions to aid the people on the ground. That requires, I assume, certain decisions on your part.

**BABBITT:** Yes. Do you “speak to power,” a well-known human rights concept? And in order to speak to power, you must have access to power.



**AZAT:** How does Women Waging Peace (WWP) work?

**BABBITT:** We do this in partnership, [including] the World Bank, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where I used to be a senior policy scholar, and the U.S. Institute for Peace, and Women Waging Peace. Our niche is our relationship with women; we’re the go-to place for identifying Iraqi women.

**AZAT:** So you provide access for these women?

**BABBITT:** Yes. We brought these 17 women, Shi’is and Sunnis and Turkemans and Kurds, some rural, some urban, all leaders, to refine their message and to hook them up with policy makers in Washington.

That’s often what we do; we’re an advocacy group. We did the executive branch. We set up meetings in the State Department with the undersecretary for global affairs, at AID with the administrator, at the Department of Defense with Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz, and at the White House with Condoleeza Rice and the president.

**AZAT:** What was your impression when you and WWP first approached the administration with information?

**BABBITT:** In the beginning, the administration didn’t understand the consequences of their lack of planning for the post-conflict situation. They did a brilliant job of planning militarily, and not much of a job of planning post-conflict. In a post-conflict situation, if everything goes right and you’ve planned beautifully, a lot of things still go wrong. You are by definition dealing with traumatized people, who are suspicious. You are working in a devastated infrastructure, from a physical standpoint as well as a psychological standpoint. To go into a situation in a neighborhood like that without much planning, many in the administration didn’t seem to understand that until much later than you would have hoped.

By the time we brought these Iraqi women to Washington [in November 2003], there were many in the administra-

tion, including the White House, eager to learn from the women and work with the women.

**AZAT:** Does the administration have an interest in Iraqi women’s issues?

**BABBITT:** Their pronouncements have been quite good. Secretary [of State Colin] Powell has been consistently good on the issue. The State Department has been wonderfully responsive, but they have not had the authority that they or we wish they had had.

Bremer [Presidential Envoy L. Paul Bremer III], in terms of what he has said, has been quite good. He clearly failed to follow through: There are only three women in the governing council initially, three out of 25. One has since been assassinated, the two remaining ones were part of our group in November. So they had obviously not translated the rhetoric into action.

It’s tough to translate rhetoric into action, and we’re here to remind them of the importance of it.

**AZAT:** What is the biggest risk or challenge in post-conflict Iraq?

**BABBITT:** It’s a very long list. Putting aside whether we should have and how we went in, look at how long it takes to knit things back together post-conflict. We all remember the good things about the Marshall Plan and the good things about McArthur in Japan; those efforts were initially supposed to take months, and McArthur was in Japan for seven years. We didn’t leave Germany for decades.

And in Germany, we were working in a country surrounded by countries with functioning democratic governments, with real infrastructure systems and a recognition of minority rights.

There’s nobody in Iraq’s neighborhood. Iraq is surrounded by countries they’ve invaded—Kuwait and Iran. It’s a terrible neighborhood; it’s a country that’s been under a ruthless dictator for decades and under a really ruthless dictator since the Gulf War. Before the Gulf War, under the Baathist Party, women had a much greater role; they were encouraged to go

to university. Iraq is full of well-educated women engineers, scientists, medical doctors from the pre-Gulf War. After the Gulf War, Saddam and the Baathist Party pushed women back down as a political gesture to conservative Islamic elements.

It’s a tough neighborhood in which to work.

**AZAT:** Is a possible sudden withdrawal a danger?

**BABBITT:** Of course. We had enormous credibility in both Germany and Japan—an overwhelming victory with respect to Japan, McArthur had a unique relationship with the emperor. McArthur was a unique fellow—a whole set of circumstances that allowed that reconstruction to go forward in a positive way.

But announcing a withdrawal and a handover date leaves you vulnerable to all the mischief that accompanies revealing your hand ahead of time.

**AZAT:** The war on terror has had a great impact here and abroad, even in right to counsel issues. How does that affect your outlook?

**BABBITT:** I am, as an American, more than conflicted, but deeply concerned about the willingness of some in the administration to override what to me is the most essential and important part of being an American—a system of laws that protects individuals and minorities from potential abuse by the government. That’s what distinguishes us on the planet earth from 98 percent of the other countries. I’m just not at all happy about tinkering with those safeguards.

**AZAT:** You’ve spent much of your career in public service on global issues. What else are you doing now?

**BABBITT:** I am the vice chair of the board of the ABA CEELI [Central and East European Law Initiative], a group that was formed right after the fall of the Berlin Wall to provide U.S. legal talent to then Central and Eastern Europe, now Central Europe and Eurasia and also Iraq. It brings American legal talent on a pro bono basis to countries emerging from authoritarian rule. ▀