

Fault lines over Radio Martí coverage

OUR OPINION: OUR GOAL IS TO PROMOTE A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC CUBA

Opinion
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The business of publishing a daily newspaper is full of pitfalls, and sometimes unintended consequences. That should be obvious to all who have paid attention to stories in The Miami Herald about journalists who receive pay from the U.S.-government operated Radio and TV Martí. The stories have been controversial and, in some cases, every detail and decision point have been scrutinized to determine a perceived ulterior motive or intent.

We have never wavered

Yet, this discussion is a good and healthy process, the essence of how a free press and free speech work in a democracy. For the record, though, some assertions about this newspaper's positions -- on Cuba and Radio Martí, for example -- are wrong and should be set right.

Our newspapers have never hesitated or wavered in expressing how evil and malevolent the Cuban government is. Fidel Castro is among history's most vile dictators, a man who has murdered innocents, imprisons free thinkers and crushes the hopes and dreams of millions. Anyone who would suggest, hint or imply that we would ever take a position that supports Castro's agenda is mistaken.

Whatever faults there have been in the coverage of this issue -- and we admit that no story is ever complete or perfect -- it is plain wrong to infer that The Miami Herald would intentionally try to help the dictator in Cuba. We want for every Cuban on the island what the people in this country enjoy every day: free elections, freedom of speech and religion, and a democratic society.

This is why we have supported Radio Martí from its very inception. After a long campaign to persuade Florida lawmakers and Congress to pass the Radio Martí bill, this is what we wrote when the measure finally was adopted in October 1983: "Radio Martí is a good idea because it is needed and because it can combat the communist threat with words, not bullets. It will have an increasingly important role in parrying the thrust of inaccuracies, lies and distortion. Thus, Radio Martí will engage the communists foursquare in the arena of ideas. May it have a long and useful life." Our opinion has not changed.

An independent press

Many question why we feel so fervently about the need for a separation between our government and our free press. We feel this way because of the untold benefits of a free press. If Cuba had a free press, it would be inconceivable that Fidel Castro would still be in power.

Finally, to the speculation that these newspapers' new corporate owner is pulling the strings, ostensibly to pave the way for a bureau in Cuba: Not true. Howard Weaver, McClatchy vice president for news, said the company has no such plans:

“We have no plans to do so. We have not authorized any such approach on our behalf by any other parties. Any speculation or assertion to the contrary is simply wrong.”