

COMMENTARY

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Hawaii Tribune-Herald

Their View

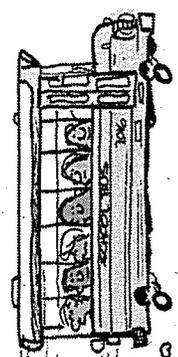
Emperor plays defense on Japan's constitution

On Monday, Japan's Emperor Akihito signaled again he would like to step down from the world's oldest hereditary monarchy. Yet, his veiled speech contained a larger message for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe: that he should proceed carefully before revising Japan's postwar constitution.

In keeping with his apolitical role, the 82-year-old Akihito did not say straight out he wanted to abdicate. Existing laws have no provision for a living emperor to give up his throne. Instead, he spoke about "a decline in my fitness level because of my advancing age."

BACK to SCHOOL OLYMPICS

THE 100-METER DASH

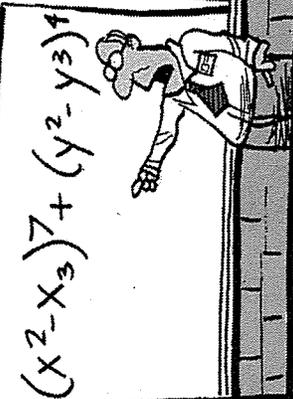


OPENING CEREMONIES

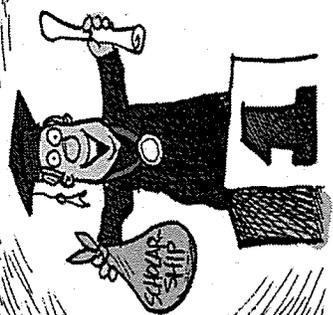
WELCOME TO MRS. SMITH'S CLASSES



MARATHON



GOING FOR THE GOLD.



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Yet, in his nearly three decades as "the symbol of the state and of the unity of the people," Akihito always made his views about Japan's proper course quietly clear. His marriage to a commoner, now the Empress Michiko, was seen as an affirmation of equality among Japanese and of the idea that marriage involves mutual consent — both values enshrined in Japan's 1947 constitution. His early championing of the Paralympics brought Japan's attention to the cause of the disabled. His expressions of remorse for the harm caused by Japan during World War II and his steadfast wishes for peace earned global goodwill.

Ironically, those most disturbed by Akihito's messages have been Japan's conservatives, some of whom long for the days when the emperor was venerated as a divine being. Unlike members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, for instance, Akihito has steadfastly refused to visit Yasukuni Shrine for Japan's war dead, maintaining the royal boycott his father started after 14 Class A war criminals were interred there in 1978.

Now, Akihito cast a shadow over the prime minister's cherished plan to change Japan's constitution, which is based largely on a blueprint created by U.S. occupation officials. The emperor's speech, coming shortly after Abe's LDP won the votes necessary to pass a revision, is being interpreted as a coded pushback, and not just to Abe's quest to revise Article 9, under which Japan renounced war and the creation or use of military forces.

Akihito referred many times, for instance, to his symbolic role, which the LDP's plan would

WASHINGTON — Every couple of years or so, I feel the need to whine about the plight of newspapers. It's August. I'm Trumped out. So, today's the day.

Except that HBO's John Oliver beat me to it with the best defense of newspapers — ever. His recent "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" monologue about the suffering newspaper industry went viral in journalism circles but he deserves a broader audience.

Besides, it's funny. Leavening his important message with enough levity to keep the dopamine flowing, Oliver points out most news outlets, *factually* and otherwise, essentially rely on newspapers for their material. This includes, he says, pulsing with self-awareness, Oliver himself. He's sort of part of the problem, in other words, but at least he knows it, which makes it OK, sort of.

The problem: People want news but they don't want to pay for it. Consequently, newspapers are failing while consumers get their information from comedy shows, talk shows and websites that essentially lift material for their own purposes.

But somewhere, somebody is actually sitting through a boring meeting, poring



Kathleen Parker

over data or interviewing someone who isn't nearly as important as he thinks he is in order to produce a story that will become news. As Oliver points out, news is a food chain, yet with rare exceptions, the most important members of the chain are at the bottom, turning off the lights in newsrooms where gladiators, scholars and characters once roamed. Some still do, though most are becoming rather long-ish in the tooth. (You can actually get that fixed, you know.)

That any newspapers are surviving, if not for much longer in any recognizable form, can be attributed at least in some part to the dedication of people who really believe in the mission of a free press and are willing to work harder for less — tweeting, blogging, filming and whatnot in addition to trying to write worthy copy. Most of the poor slob who fell in love with the printed word go unnoticed by any but their peers. An exception is Marty Baron, the unassuming

Hurray for HBO's John Oliver

executive editor of The Washington Post, recently featured in the film, "Spotlight" about the Boston Globe's stories under Baron's leadership about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

It's a good movie, not just because of great casting and acting but because it's a great tale about a massive investigative effort that led to church reform and the beginning of healing for victims. (Not to worry, my pay comes as a percentage of the money I make for the company. This won't make a dime of difference.)

My point — shared by Oliver — is that only newspapers are the brick-and-mortar of the Fourth Estate's edifice. Only they have the wherewithal to do the kind of reporting that leads to stories such as "Spotlight." What happens to the "news" when there are no newspapers left?

We seem doomed to find out as people increasingly give up their newspaper subscriptions and seek information from free-content sources. And though newspapers have an online presence, it's hard to get readers to pay for content.

As Oliver says, now is a very good time to be a corrupt politician. Between buyouts, layoffs and news-hole reductions, there's hardly anyone paying attention. Except, perhaps, to kitties.

In a hilarious spinoff of "Spotlight" called "Stoplight," Oliver shows a short film of a news meeting where the old-school reporter is pitching a story about city hall corruption. The rest of the staff, cheerful human topiaries to the reporter's kudzu-draped mangrove — are more interested in a cat that looks like a raccoon.

And then there's Sam Zell, erstwhile owner of the Tribune Company, who summed up the sad trajectory of the nation's interests and, perhaps, our future while speaking to Orlando Sentinel staffers in 2008. When he said he wanted to increase revenues by giving readers what they want, a female voice objected, "What readers want are puppy dogs"

Zell exploded, calling her comment the sort of "journalistic arrogance of deciding that puppies don't count. ... Hopefully, we get to the point where our revenue is so significant that we can do puppies and Iraq, OK? (Expletive) you."

Yes, he said that. Moral of the story: If you don't subscribe to a newspaper, you don't get to complain about the sorry state of journalism — and puppies you shall have.

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The fall — and rise? — of moderate Republicans

change — to make the emperor or again the “head of state” and exempt him from having to uphold the constitution. The LDP draft constitution deletes an article on the universality of human rights; specifies that the exercise of rights shall “not infringe the public interest and public order”; and invokes citizens’ responsibilities and duties, including respect for the flag and the national anthem. (At a garden party in 2004, the emperor famously scolded a bureaucrat for arguing that teachers should stand facing the flag and sing the national anthem.) The draft constitution also grants the government more powers in emergencies and make it easier to revise the constitution in the future.

The country’s old constitution should hardly be frozen in amber. So much has changed since Gen. Douglas MacArthur, in 1949, envisioned Japan as the “Switzerland of the Pacific.” And notwithstanding conservative fears, there’s no good reason why Japan couldn’t change its Imperial Household Law to enable the emperor to abdicate. But Akihito’s pronouncements, this week and through the years, are a reminder of the Japanese people’s understandable ambivalence toward revising the constitution, and of the need for a robust and unfettered debate before any change is made.

— Bloomberg View

Libertarianism has long been treated as a fringe ideology obsessed with the gold standard, legalization of hard drugs and “Atlas Shrugged.” Ron Paul, who ran for president in the 2012 GOP primaries, was the archetype, calling for an end to Social Security and the Federal Reserve. But when Libertarian Party presidential nominee Gary Johnson extols fiscal responsibility and social tolerance, he brings to mind a different political tradition: that of moderate Republicans.

There was a time, not so long ago, when they dominated the GOP. Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush sprang from this wing of the party. So, arguably, did George W. Bush, along with nominees such as Bob Dole, John McCain and Mitt Romney. But the party has moved steadily to the right recently. Rank-and-file GOP voters grew significantly more conservative in the first decade of this century. It’s a measure of how conservative House Republicans have become that Speaker Paul Ryan, once a tea party hero, is now viewed with distrust by many in his caucus.

That growing tilt leaves an electoral opening for a candidate who thinks the government shouldn’t meddle too much in either markets or morals. Hillary Clinton isn’t interested in occupying it. So Johnson, who is averaging 9 percent support in the RealClearPolitics

average of four-way polls that include him and Green Party nominee Jill Stein, has that niche to himself. In Kansas, long solidly Republican, moderates are rebounding, thanks to the unpopularity of conservative Gov. Sam Brownback. In the Aug. 2 legislative primary, moderates defeated incumbent Brownback allies in more than a dozen races.

Since 2012, the share of Republicans who say they are economically and socially conservative has shrunk from 57 percent to 42 percent. But the national party’s message hasn’t caught up with that trend. If Trump loses — and particularly if he loses big — moderates might find themselves taken more seriously

in Congress and the party. Many Republicans probably already are wondering how much brighter their electoral prospects would be with, say, John Kasich of Ohio atop the ballot in November. Victories by senators who clashed with Trump would give them more influence on the GOP’s direction. A strong showing by Libertarian Johnson would encourage Republicans to adopt at least some of his ideas. And voter frustration with gridlock might aid lawmakers who don’t treat compromise as a crime.

Pragmatic, centrist Republicans largely have vanished from the American political scene. But their absence leaves a vacuum that begs to be filled.

— Chicago Tribune

By Garry Trudeau

Doonesbury Classics

