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5 Best Tuesday Columns

By CAITLIN DICKSON, ERIK HAYDEN AND RAY GUSTINI | January 04, 2011 8:17am



- **Roger Pilon on Congress Rediscovering the Constitution** If newly arriving GOP legislators are serious about their bringing constitutionality to the forefront of American politics, they had better plan on doing much more than reading the document aloud and requiring members to cite the "specific constitutional authority for any bill they introduce," figures the Cato Institute Vice President in [The Wall Street Journal](#). Pilon proceeds to guide readers through a historical evolution of the "constitutional" and concludes by prescribing three "tall order" guideposts for legislators who'd like to restore limited constitutional government: 1) "Keep the debate focused on the Constitution, not simply on policy or practicality." 2) Reject the "facile liberal objection that the courts have sanctioned what we have today." 3) "Congress must acknowledge honestly that it has not kept faith with the limits the Constitution imposes. It should then stop delegating its legislative powers to executive agencies," and either "vote on the sea of regulations the executive branch is promulgating or, far better, rescind or defund those regulations, policies and programs that never should have been promulgated in the first place."
- **Jonah Goldberg on Bloomberg and Schwarzenegger** The New York City mayor and outgoing California governor have worked hard to present themselves as above the partisan fray, writes Goldberg in the [Los Angeles Times](#), but recent setbacks for both are a reminder that sloganeering is no substitute for leadership. Bloomberg and Schwarzenegger have been "deemed heroic [in the press] for abandoning ideology to focus on pragmatic problem-solving" and governing from the center, an assessment that overlooks the fact that politics, by its very nature, is a conflict between people who "disagree about how to solve problems." An apolitical politician is a contradiction in terms, and "getting politics out of problem-solving is synonymous with getting democracy out of politics." Goldberg cites Schwarzenegger's inability to deal with California's budget crunch and Bloomberg's ham-fisted response to the recent blizzard as proof the two are more interested in self-promotion than governing. "The point," Goldberg concludes, "is that ideology is in the eye of the beholder and that pursuing nonpartisanship for its own sake isn't necessarily courageous or wise."
- **Richard Cohen on the 'Distant' Military** The [Washington Post](#) columnist reflects on his military

experience during the Vietnam War and how much farther-removed today's society is from the military. Cohen notes that, as a participant, he was able to recognize the good and bad of the military, like any other large institution. In contrast, he compares today's military to a priesthood: "it is virtually worshipped for its admirable qualities while its less admirable ones are hardly mentioned or known." Cohen wonders if, had there been a draft for the current wars, people would have fought harder to prevent them from occurring or to bring them to an end sooner. Instead, he insists, "the all-volunteer military has enabled America to fight two wars while many of its citizens do not know of a single fatality or of anyone who has fought overseas."

- **David Brooks on a New Test for Government** The [New York Times](#) columnist says the best way to minimize the conflicts bound to arise about the role of government during the next Congress is to frame the issue of government efficiency as an "achievement test." The criteria for evaluating a program will be simple. "Does a given policy arouse energy, foster skills, spur social mobility and help people transform their lives?" Brooks cites the G.I. Bill and the Homestead Act as pieces of legislation that pass this test. Such a debate would focus Americans on the next big challenge facing the country: "moving from a consumption-dominated economy oriented around satisfying immediate needs toward a more balanced investment and consumption economy."
- **Hal Herzog on the Neutral Effect of Having a Pet** The [New York Times](#) op-ed contributor wonders what exactly people get from the money they spend taking care of pets. Herzog rounds up some evidence of the medical benefits that pets can provide--"that stroking an animal lowers blood pressure, that AIDS patients living with pets are less depressed and that pet owners have lower cholesterol levels, sleep more soundly, exercise more and take fewer sick days than non-pet owners"--and rebuts it with research suggesting that living with an animal actually has no effect on one's health. "The truth is we know little about how pets could affect us biologically, or why a health benefit accrues to some people but not others," he acknowledges. "Answering these questions will require the same rigorous methods that scientists use to test the effectiveness of drugs and medical procedures."

Sources

- [Fido's No Doctor](#) *Hal Herzog*, The New York Times
- [Rediscovering the Constitution](#) *Roger Pilon*, The Wall Street Journal
- [How Little the U.S. Knows of War](#) *Richard Cohen*, The Washington Post
- [The Achievement Test](#) *David Brooks*, The New York Times
- [Dysfunctional Duo's Undoing](#) *Jonah Goldberg*, Los Angeles Times

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