

opinion

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EDITORIAL

Alternatives to Mr. Abe's way

The campaign for the July 21 Upper House election officially kicked off Wednesday. The results of this election will have a great impact on the future of Japan because it is being fought over extremely important issues such as constitutional revisions, nuclear power generation and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade pact. Voters need to read campaign promises and think carefully before casting their votes.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will eagerly try to sell his economic policy, which is coupled with massive monetary easing by the Bank of Japan. But small and medium-size companies and local economies have not benefited from his policy.

It must not be forgotten that if a large amount of money is poured into an economy in which businesses' desire to increase capital investment and people's purchasing power are weak, it is likely to cause an economic bubble. Opposition parties must present alternative, convincing economic policies to voters.

These days Mr. Abe is playing down his call for weakening the Constitution's Article 96, which is designed to prevent imprudent constitutional revisions. But the Liberal Democratic Party's campaign promise includes draft revisions to the Constitution that would change Article 96 so that amendments could be initiated with a concurring vote of a simple majority of all the members of each House of the Diet, instead of the present two-thirds or more.

Such a move will make it easy to weaken the principle that sovereignty rests with the people; the no-war principle; freedom of thought, speech and expression; freedom of assembly and association, etc. — all the basic and important tenets of the Constitution.

Even if political forces favoring weakening Article 96 do not get a two-thirds majority of the Upper House in the coming election, Mr. Abe will try again in the 2016 Upper House election. Voters should take into account the possibility that Mr. Abe will dissolve the

Lower House in 2016 to hold a double election in an attempt to revise Article 96.

If the LDP wins the coming election, Mr. Abe will likely introduce a bill to guard national secrets along with a bill to create a National Security Council. Such a bill will restrict people's right to know what their government is doing, limit the activities of journalists and lead to the accumulation of more national secrets, thus weakening the foundation of democracy.

Mr. Abe will also likely to change the interpretation of the Constitution so that Japan can exercise the right to collective self-defense. Voters must pay sufficient attention to these possible future moves by the prime minister.

The LDP is the only party that appears eager to restart nuclear power plants. Political parties must delve into the question of whether it is safe and rational to operate nuclear power plants in this quake-prone country and whether there is adequate technology to safely store high-level radioactive waste.

The TPP includes an investor-state dispute settlement mechanism. This could empower global business enterprises to supersede policies and actions of the central and local governments in such areas as environmental protection, food safety and social welfare, including health insurance. Political parties have not fully discussed this point. Voters need to carefully consider the nature of the ISD mechanism.

The LDP government rarely talks about social welfare, an issue that will become increasingly important in Japan's future. Political parties should discuss how to create a sustainable social welfare system while ensuring there is sufficient support for the needy.

Voter turnout for the last Upper House election in 2010 was only 57.92 percent. To boost turnout in the coming election, political parties must make serious efforts to come up with policy platforms that truly address the needs of the people.

Shuffling the books on nursing care

The health and welfare ministry is considering cutting nursing care insurance costs by shifting elderly people who do not need intensive nursing care from care services provided under the insurance system to care services provided by municipalities.

Because local governments' financial conditions vary from municipality to municipality, such a change could introduce inequality into the level of services offered to elderly people.

To receive services under the nursing care insurance system, people must take tests to receive certification that they need care. Those who are approved are classified into one of seven categories in ascending order from the least to the greatest need of care.

Each category has a limit on available services calculated in terms of cost. Within the limit, insured people have to shoulder 10 percent of the cost. Beyond that limit, they must pay all costs.

Under the ministry's new plan, services from the insurance system would be ended for people classified in the lowest two categories. Instead, municipalities would provide services to them.

As of December 2012, some 1.5 million people fell into those categories, accounting for more than a quarter of all elderly people recognized as having need of care. Helpers mainly assist with housekeeping, shopping and cooking. The costs of these services amount to about 5 percent of the total costs of the services provided under the nursing care insurance system. Total costs have been on the increase from the initial ¥3.6 trillion in fiscal 2000 to ¥7.8 trillion in fiscal 2010 and to ¥8.9 trillion in fiscal 2012. They will likely reach

¥21 trillion in fiscal 2025 when most postwar baby boomers are at least 75 years old.

Unless premiums for the insurance system are raised, more tax money will need to be injected into the system. The average monthly premium paid by people aged 65 and up was about ¥2,900 in fiscal 2000. In fiscal 2013, it was about ¥5,000. The ministry says that if nothing is done, the average monthly premium will go up to about ¥8,200 in fiscal 2025.

The ministry insists that if municipalities use volunteers and nonprofit organizations, they will be able to provide services to elderly people requiring a lower level of care at a lower cost than under the nursing care insurance system. But many municipalities are suffering from shortages of funds and human resources, and there is the danger that the quality of the services will worsen.

First and foremost, excluding some people from the nursing care insurance system runs counter to its spirit. The ministry's proposal also will lead to a deterioration of measures designed to maintain the physical and mental health of elderly people whose care needs are presently small. As a result, the number of elderly people whose conditions are severe will increase, thus pushing up the total costs of the insurance system.

The ministry should realize that its proposal will not lead to lower costs unless the quality of care is reduced as well. It should instead try to rein in costs by coming up with economical and effective ways to keep elderly people as healthy as possible. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Bugs draw out EU sense of melodrama

KYODO

There seems a touch of playacting in the outrage that France, Germany and other European governments have been venting since the online edition of *Der Spiegel*, the German newsmagazine, reported that the National Security Agency had bugged diplomatic offices and monitored their internal computer systems. Spying on allies looks bad and is rarely discussed in public except when, as now, spy agency documents are leaked to the press. But governments on both sides of the Atlantic (and almost everywhere else) have spied on allies and enemies alike for a long time.

NSA was secretly created in 1952 with a mandate to intercept all kinds of communications from foreign sources, using every kind of listening device imaginable. The new element is computer technology that makes storage so cheap

and data analysis so fast. That makes policy restraints all the more important. But it is hard to debate wise policy when every detail is kept secret from public view.

Most European governments presumably have long been aware of NSA's capabilities. Ordinary Europeans, however, were unaware, until *Der Spiegel* published the numbers this week, of just how many private phone calls, e-mails and text messages NSA now monitors in Europe each month. The magazine reported 500 million in Germany alone in a single month. That large number raises suspicions that a lot of NSA snooping has no connection to America's national security.

NSA listening in on ordinary Europeans is perfectly legal under U.S. law; the agency is prohibited only from snooping on Americans without court authorization. German intelligence agencies are similarly prohibited from spying on Germans. It is

naive to assume that allied intelligence agencies do not share data that may be off limits to one and not the other.

That's why the outrage of European politicians seems overblown, as are their threats to suspend talks on a trans-Atlantic trade deal (negotiating strategies may have been the aim of NSA monitoring). It would not be surprising to learn that the Europeans have been trying to glean intelligence on America's negotiating strategy, too. Still, a deal remains in the best interest of all participants.

One good result of the recent disclosures might be to reinforce European demands for tighter rules on the collection of data about private individuals by companies and governments. NSA may not view such rules as limiting its covert activities, but they might cause the agency to be more careful and selective in its practices.

New York Times (July 3)

New York's 'stop and frisk' conundrum

THE WASHINGTON POST

New York City, home to more than 8 million people, is the nation's largest metropolitan area. It's also America's safest big city.

Last year the New York City Police Department (NYPD) recorded 419 homicides, nearly a 20 percent decrease from the year before and the lowest rate per 100,000 residents since the department began keeping reliable tallies in 1963. If New York had the same homicide rate as the District of Columbia, it would be investigating 800 more murder cases per annum; if it had Detroit's statistics, nearly 4,000 more New Yorkers would be murdered every year. Without question, the Big Apple is doing something right.

Officials say much of that has to do with its "stop and frisk" policy, under which officers can stop and search anyone on the street they deem to be suspicious. Mayor Michael Bloomberg and his police chief, Raymond Kelly, say the procedure has saved up to 5,000 lives in the past 10 years.

The policy is controversial, though, and the subject of a federal class action lawsuit because the vast majority of those stopped are young men of color. According to the New York Civil Liberties Union, 87 percent of those stopped in 2012 were black or Latino, a figure more or less consistent throughout the last decade. This tends to hold true even in predominantly white, affluent neighborhoods where blacks and Latinos make up barely a quarter of the

population but nearly 80 percent of stops. The racial disparity is a problem that can't be ignored. Last week, the New York City Council approved a pair of bills known together as the Community Safety Act. The first would create an inspector general to supervise NYPD's activities; the second would create avenues for citizens to sue NYPD in state court not only for cases of individual bias but also against police without clear law enforcement components that have a disproportionate impact on protected groups, such as racial minorities.

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