

Olympics should go ahead

I have just come back from almost a week of vacation, with all the stresses that entails.

Some people can put work behind them for a couple of days, but I can't. During vacations, I'm either thinking about the work I've done or about the work I'm not doing.

Vacations and I just don't mix.

But I did try, with some success, to avoid work. One thing I was able to avoid was the news. I would briefly check out some news websites when I got up in the morning, and I made a point of buying a couple of the dailies when we'd get to the local shops. But since nothing really earth-shattering jumped out at me, I was able to put most of the world's affairs on the proverbial back burner, at least for a couple of days.

Indeed, I only turned on CNN once the whole time we were away, and quickly became disinterested. After maybe about 10 minutes of not listening to it, I sought and got my wife's permission to turn the tube off.

One issue I had been interested in before going away, and in which I sort of lost touch, had to do with the upcoming winter Olympics, planned for early 2014 in Sochi, Russia, and Russian policies when it comes to homosexuality.

Actor George Takei has been sort of leading the fight on this one. Takei, as most people with even a passing interest in science fiction know, played the immortal Mr. Sulu, the helmsman on the Starship Enterprise on the original Star Trek series. He has also been prominent in recent years for his position on gay rights.

From what I have read and heard so far, Takei doesn't strike me as a guy who's making a lot of noise for the sake of making noise or getting attention. I think his positions are sincere.

Now to his credit, he's not suggesting a boycott of the Games. We're not looking at a repeat of what then American President Jimmy Carter did in 1980. You will recall he was mad at the Soviets for their invasion of Afghanistan, so he organized a Western boycott of the summer Olympics, which were planned that year in Moscow. The result was predictable. The only people hurt by the action were the athletes who had spent years learning their crafts for the chance of a lifetime. They got the short end, while the Soviets stayed in Afghanistan until the realities of history prompted them to leave (Carter and company had nothing to do with it). And Eastern powers boycotted the 1984 Games in Los Angeles, thus basically making farces of two consecutive summer Olympics. So the last thing we need is another boycott, so good on Takei for seeing that.

On the other hand, I don't think the idea he has put forth is the answer; namely moving the Games to Vancouver. Granted a lot of the infrastructure that helped make the 2010 Games such a success would still be in place. But a lot of it wouldn't be available. As we're finding out with the current plans for the 2015 Pan Am Games, these events require tons of planning, on numerous different levels.

They are not things that can just be thrown together.

So how do we deal with Takei's issue?

The man is gay, and has been up front about that for almost eight years.

I think, too, it is true that the attitudes in this society to such issues have changed a lot in the last couple of decades.

There was a time in recent history when cracks against a man's sexual orientation were deemed among the most ultimate of insults. I was subjected to a couple of them over the years.

High school was a high time for such talk, but don't forget this was in the 1970s, when society generally tolerated a lot more than it does today. Such cracks stopped bothering me when I came to realize they sometimes represented shots being taken by people who were mad at me for other reasons. They'd fire such verbal 'buckshot' because that was the best they could come up with.

Here comes a digression, but I sometimes have trouble with the movement to ban such verbal attacks in high schools. It's under such circumstances, among lots of others, that one develops a thick hide. In my case, it has proven useful in dealing with a lot of the hostile reaction I have to put up with in my job. I think the same would work in other occupations too.

Indeed, the last time such a shot was taken at me came from a reader who was mad at me over something, and took it out by shouting a whole lot of garbage into the phone.

'I really don't need this abuse I'm being handed,' I told him after a couple of minutes of his cussing.

He responded with an attack on my sexual orientation - the first time that had happened to me since high school. Needless to say, the conversation ended a couple of seconds later.

The point is I don't hear such cracks much any more. And I don't think it's because I spend most of my time in the company of adults. Any one who hangs around adults for any length of time soon learns a lot of them never grow up.

It's been many years since I've had much time for homophobes.

Indeed, I grew up living across the street from two men, who eventually became close friends of my family. Sadly, they both have

been dead for some years, but they both especially stepped up when my father died, taking care of my mother, having her over for dinner, quickly accepting her invitations to dine with her, etc. One of the guys phoned me one day out of the blue at work, concerned that he hadn't seen my mom in a couple of days. As it turned out, they had just kept missing each other. But it was something of a relief for me to know someone was keeping an eye on things.

So while I have no use for homophobia, I also have little use for grandstand plays against it, which is what I think Takei is trying to engineer.

It's okay for him to make some noise, or even a lot of it. Indeed, if Takei and others like him make enough noise, the International Olympic Committee might, in future, be a little more careful when it comes to deciding where to hold games.

But when it comes to the 2014 spectacle, I think things have already progressed too far. The only people who stand to be hurt are those who deserve it the least ? the athletes.

So let the Russians have their Games, and let them show off to the world how swell they are.

If the George Takeis of this world play their cards right, this might be the last such event they get to host for a long time

