

Sankei Shimbun on-line

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### **Reading the World from Osaka**

#### **US Consul-General married to husband of same sex: "I Want to Live Honestly"**

Same-sex marriage will likely be an issue in the US presidential election next fall, as President Obama has concluded that a federal law defining marriage as between a man and a woman is unconstitutional. Actually, Mr. Patrick Linehan, 58, who arrived in Osaka in September of this year as U.S. Consul-General, has been open about his same-sex marriage with Japanese-Brazilian Emerson Kanegusuke, 39. I interviewed Mr. Linehan about same-sex marriage.

I would be lying if I said I had viewed him without bias.

"Thank you very much for agreeing to an interview on a sensitive issue." When I began the interview this way, with an indirect reference to the subject, Mr. Linehan said, "Not at all, not at all. And it's not a sensitive issue -- it's life."

He introduced Mr. Kanegusuke as "my husband." He was as poised as Mr. Linehan. He left the Brazilian Air Force, where he had served as an air traffic controller, and came to Japan. In 2002, he met Mr. Linehan, then the press attaché at the U.S. Embassy, at a Tokyo sports bar.

They started living together on the Embassy's housing compound, went together to Brazil, Mr. Linehan's next post, then on to Canada for Mr. Linehan's next assignment, where they married in 2007. They came to Osaka in September this year, following Mr. Linehan's tour of duty at the US Embassy in Seoul.

At various functions where past consuls-general were accompanied by their wives, Mr. Linehan is accompanied by Mr. Kanegusuke. When Mr. Linehan visited the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima City, he stood side-by-side with Mr. Kanegusuke to lay a wreath at the cenotaph for atomic-bomb victims.

I had asked for this interview simply because a consul-general who is open about his same-sex marriage was a curiosity to me. Same-sex marriage will likely be an issue in

the U.S. presidential campaign. OK, this would be another article under my name, I thought. I was just curious. My motive was less than pure.

I am such a reporter. And to a reporter like me, Mr. Linehan said over and over again, "I want to be honest." I took that to mean "I want to live honestly with myself." Being gay is an innate orientation, and it is not honest to lie about or hide one's homosexuality.



For a long time, US society did not allow homosexuals to live "honestly." Coming out of the closet meant being removed from society. Even in 1984, when Mr. Linehan began working for the U.S. government, an employee faced dismissal if his or her homosexuality was discovered. During the Clinton administration things improved greatly for gay people, and an openly gay man was appointed ambassador. There is now an organization of several hundred gay employees at the State Department.

In February this year, President Obama stated that the 1996 federal law defining marriage as between a man and a woman is unconstitutional. It will be inevitable that moves toward legalization of same-sex marriage at the federal level will provoke strong opposition from supporters of the Republican Party. It may surface as a major campaign issue during the presidential election next fall.

The US as a whole, however, is rapidly moving toward acceptance of homosexuals. Viewed from Mr. Linehan's standpoint, the US is becoming a society that allows gay people to "live honestly." There are about 650,000 same-sex households in the US.

In June this year New York became the sixth state to allow same-sex marriage. Massachusetts became the first in 2004. The shift toward acceptance of same-sex marriage is farther along than the fact that it has legal sanction in only six of fifty states might suggest.

A 1996 Gallup poll showed overwhelming opposition to same-sex marriage, with "27% in favor, and 68%, opposed. That year marked the peak of opposition and also the lowest rate of approval. This year's Gallup poll indicates that support (53%) and non-support (45%) rates have reversed. These rates have been in inverse proportion over

the past 15 years.

The younger generation expresses more support for same-sex marriage. The latest data suggests a trend toward overwhelming approval in the near future. Looking back a few decades from now, the present age will probably turn out to have been a time when supporters and opponents were more or less in equilibrium.

California's example symbolizes this equilibrium. In 2008, the state supreme court upheld same-sex marriage, but the approval was overturned by a referendum the same year. The case was subsequently brought to a federal court, and a fierce battle between supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage has raged ever since.

I came across this statement in an essay published in *The New York Times* by Professor Alexander Stille of Columbia University: "Afro-Americans, women, Hispanics, and homosexuals...Groups that have been excluded have been accepted into the U.S. one after another, granted equal rights, and taken into the mainstream."

He made it easy to understand the granting of rights to gay people by placing it in historical context.

The US, where African-Americans were once slaves, elected an African-American as president. President Obama said, "As a Christian, I feel uncomfortable about same-sex marriage," while also maintaining that he is "a fierce advocate for equality for homosexuals."

For Christians, who believe that Adam and Eve created the world, gay marriage may elicit mixed feelings. The president has been resorting to reason to exorcise his own bias.

I'm not a person of strong faith. It may simply be that I'm not used to seeing things this way.

On same-sex marriage, Mr. Linehan said, "I find Japan very accepting." When introducing Mr. Kanegusuke as "my husband," the person's feeling of surprise or bewilderment sometimes comes across. But it is only momentary. "Japanese people don't display their feelings so much and are quick to understand. I haven't received

any negative reaction at all,” said Mr. Linehan. The wives of successive consuls-general have taken an honorary post at a women’s organization for promoting Japan-US friendship. Mr. Kanegusuke is the first man to fill the post. “At first I thought I’d decline, but they talked about their need to modernize themselves and their organization, and I was persuaded to accept the post,” said Mr. Kanegusuke with delight.

An hourlong chat with Mr. Kanegusuke and Mr. Linehan led me to believe it’s easy to view homosexuality without prejudice.

Consul-General Linehan reports his activities on Facebook. Please visit <http://www.facebook.com/ConsulGeneralOK>

(Written by Hideaki Sakamoto)

\*\*\* U.S. Embassy translation \*\*\*