Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Ed Whelan: Get a new research team! Whelan is the widely respected president of the Ethics & Public Policy Center. He penned a column criticizing the U.S. bishops' conference for their brief in the *Janus* v. *AFSCME* case. There are corrections in the body of the text, and he has now posted a second, shorter column, explaining an additional correction.

But, in addition to the mistakes that have already been noted, the ones that jumped out at me were in this paragraph:

> *In its quest to pad its list of bishops' statements against right-to-work laws generally, the USCCB brief also relies heavily on statements that were not in fact by bishops—such as a 1947 statement by the "Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference" and the 1965 testimony of the NCWC's Social Action director, Msgr. George Higgins.*

Surely Whelan knows that from 1922 until 1966, the U.S. bishops' conference was known as the National Catholic Welfare Conference and that Higgins was the staff director for one of the bishops' conference committees, therefore, he spoke only on

their behalf when testifying before Congress.

The article is also mistaken in suggesting that the long tradition of magisterial teaching in support of the right to organize does not apply to public sector unions. "Yet the brief treats any statement that generally opposes right-to-work laws as though it would specifically oppose right-to-work laws governing the public sector," he writes.

In Europe, which was the dominant focus of popes writing the statements on labor, public sector unions are even older and larger than those in the U.S. If the popes wanted to draw a distinction between public and private sector unions, they could have done so. To argue that *maybe* they did not intend to include public sector unions in their general statements about the right to organize because they did not explicitly mention them is like saying the general prohibition against sexual relations outside of marriage may not apply to certain types of sexual encounters because they are not explicitly mentioned.

As I say, Whelan is known as a careful thinker, one who is committed to the church and suspicious of the kind of libertarian arguments made by Janus in this case. I am gobsmacked to see him suggesting the staff at the U.S. bishops' conference ran amok on this brief when it is so obviously in a long line of explicit church teaching.

The Democratic Party seems beyond saving. This Politico article examines so-called progressives taking on Democratic incumbents. I will write at greater length about this in the future, but for now, just consider this quote:

> "*I think Donald Trump getting elected president is part of it — the old institutional political knowledge we had about the way things works clearly just doesn't work. And now people are knocking down the door,*" *said Bill Hyers, a political consultant and campaign strategist for New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand. "There's a new energy and excitement out there in a new way, and it's palpable.*"

Really? Most diagnoses of what went wrong with Hillary Clinton's campaign have concluded that if she had listened to those with "old institutional political knowledge" instead of to her hipster computer team, she would be in the White House today. David Betras, party chair in Mahoning County, Ohio, tried to warn the

Clinton campaign about what was happening in the Rust Belt. They didn't have time to listen to an old-timer. They lost Ohio by eight points.

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Example No. 2 of Democrats and liberals living in a bubble. How much ink has been spilt fretting about the president's latest insults, his tweets on "due process" for those accused of sexual harassment, or John Kelly's deplorable remarks about immigrants being lazy? But, it is not what they say that matters, but what they do.

Stop falling for Trump's distraction tactics and focus on issues like this: The number of noncriminal arrests made by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency doubled last year.

What should Democrats do to bolster their chances of defeating Republicans in the midterms? Hire Jack Meztgar as head of the Democratic National Committee. His essay at the Working-Class Perspectives blog make the case for Democrats to adopt a positive program, not just an anti-Trump agenda, that is focused on making investment income (and wealth) taxable the same way other forms of income (and wealth) are taxed. I especially like the idea of playing property tax rates off against investment income rates.

At America, Jesuit Fr. Matt Malone writes about polarization and the necessity of raising up public intellectuals schooled in philosophy if we, as a culture, are to seriously seek to resolve this polarization, or at least its most crippling effects.

"In order to do that, however, we must first rescue academic philosophy from its largely self-induced irrelevance," he writes. Preach it, Fr. Malone!

The "largely self-induced irrelevance" of academic philosophy (and not just philosophy!) is a problem of enormous proportions and who else could lead the way out of the morass than Catholic higher education?