Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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May 8, 2018
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The heat is on: A slew of emails obtained by a Freedom of Information Request indicate that the Koch Brothers and the Federalist Society's Leonard Leo exercised influence over the selection of professors at the George Mason University Law School. Readers will not be surprised if they recall my two-part review of the book *Democracy in Chains* which followed the career of James Buchanan who ended up at George Mason (Part 1 here and Part 2 here). Is anyone really surprised? Did you think the Koch Brothers and Leo were giving this money with no intention of exercising influence? My question: What influence did the Koch Brothers buy for their $10 million gift to the Tim & Steph Busch business school at Catholic University of America? Do we now know the extent of inflation across the millennia: Thirty pieces of silver circa 33 AD is now 10 million dollars?

How immoral are Republicans? The so-called "pro-family" party is instructing border patrol agents to warn those seeking asylum that the mothers will be separated from their children. This news report in February first warned of this horrific tactic and I am hearing reports from the border that it is happening again. The U.S. bishops and the Knights of Columbus and EWTN all tell us that we must support "pro-family" candidates and stay focused on opposing same-sex marriage. Surely, this is a more

direct attack on the family than even the worst nightmares the conservatives had about the effects of same-sex marriage. Did I miss the outrage at EWTN?

In the Washington Post, David Weigel and Paul Kane on the growing list of Democratic congressional candidates who find it necessary to state publicly that, if elected, they will not vote for Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to become Speaker of the House. Charlie Gerow, at The Hill, reports the same. Pelosi and her allies insist, rightly, that much of the attacks against her are unfair, but that is like complaining about the wind. For too long, too many negative ads have made her name a shorthand for what many voters don't like about Democrats. She should make the GOP advertising work harder and announce she will not be running for speaker if the Democrats recapture the House.

Speaking of the House, E.J. Dionne's column yesterday bespeaks much truth, most especially the fact that one of the reasons so many young people run from religion is that they associate it with the religious right, homophobia, etc. But, I feel a contrarian itch coming on also. Liberals bear more blame than Dionne allows, a point I shall take up tomorrow.

Today is the 134th anniversary of the birth of Harry S. Truman. Democrats looking to take back the White House should be studying his campaign in 1948. Do not underestimate the power of emotional connection. Thomas Dewey was supposed to win but he was the Hillary Clinton of his day, a candidate who looked great on paper but who simply did not connect with the voters. Truman did and was one of our greatest presidents to boot. Happy birthday Harry!

At the Flipboard, Ron Brownstein on whether Catholic support for Trump is slipping, and what that means. There is dispute, now, about whether white Catholics really broke so heavily for Trump and further speculation that the Kremlin may have helped Trump with Catholics but, whatever the margin, enough of them did that he carried the Rust Belt states that put him over the top.

As people go into a frenzy about the royal wedding, Sarah Attfield at Working Class Perspectives offers a helpful tonic of balance, reminding us how distant these people are from the lives of ordinary people. That said, Attfield oversteps when she says "Nationalism is divisive and exclusionary." Nationalism can be those things, but Michael Foucault was wrong when he insisted that "all distinctions are violent." The left's blindness to the human pull of traditions and families and nations, all of which

involve distinctions, makes it always a bit surprised by conservatism's resilience and, what is worse, by fascism's. Still, nice to have a bit of royal-bashing for balance.

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At Religion News Service, Mark Silk does the deep dive into President Donald Trump's new executive order on the Faith-Based Office and how his administration has removed a key religious liberty protection that the Obama administration included. I am wondering if the Becket Fund and other avatars of religious freedom will protest this embryonic form of establishment? The U.S. bishops?

In the "please, oh please, oh please let lightning strike twice" category: Politico reports that GOP Senate hopeful, and ex-con Don Blankenship is surging ahead of his more establishment rivals for the Republican nomination. Blankenship invariably has the words "coal baron" placed before his name in news reports. First Alabama. Now West Virginia. Blankenship is the man who referred to Sen. Mitch McConnell as "Cocaine Mitch" and ran a racist video attacking McConnell's "China family." The GOP base may be the Democrats' secret weapon this cycle.

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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