Opinion

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A picture of Jakelin Caal, a 7-year-old girl who died in U.S. custody after crossing illegally from Mexico to the U.S, is seen during a Dec. 15 protest held in El Paso, Texas, to demand justice for her. (CNS photo/Reuters/Jose Luis Gonzalez)



by Michael Sean Winters

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At RNS, my colleague Mark Silk discusses the moral inadequacy of carbon tax proposals. It is remarkable that so many environmental activists continue to embrace this lousy idea, which has all the markings of a New Democrat circa 1991 vintage. One of the strongest things the environmental cause has going for it is the sturdiness of the science behind it. Why turn to Reagan-era economics to bring the case home?

Looking for a hero? Judge Emmett Sullivan, appointed to the courts by three different presidents, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, cut through all the spin surrounding Michael Flynn, the former general who served as President Trump's first National Security advisor. "I mean, arguably, that undermines everything this flag over here stands for," the judge said to Flynn as he considered his sentence. "Arguably, you sold your country out."

Soon, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez will be a member of Congress, but she is already making waves. Also blunders. In this Politico report, her team lets it be known that she intends to go after Cong. Hakeem Jeffries in 2020. Jeffries is also a rising star in the Democratic Party, which begs the question: Why is Ocasio-Cortez not looking for ways to take on Republicans? Beware persons who rise a little too quickly for their own good, whether it is Ross Douthat at the New York Times or Ocasio-Cortez in the Congress.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has been a frequent target of criticism in these pages, so I take special delight in being able to commend the conference for issuing a powerful statement after the death of Jakelin Caal Maquin, the 7-year old girl who died after crossing the border in the desert because the standard checkpoints have become bottlenecks under Trump. The bishops are at their best when they speak to the simple humanity of a situation, devoid of political considerations.

Ben Shapiro, the rightwing ideologue whose radio talk show represents the next generation of ridiculous rightwing propaganda, had an interesting guest last week: Bishop Robert Barron. I will have more to say about this in the new year, but for now, my only sentiment is: Bring back the bodybuilders!

At NPR, a report on the personal toll the after-effects of Hurricane Maria are still taking on the island of Puerto Rico: In the town of Lares, a mudslide was so bad, it is still impossible to visit the graves In the municipal cemetery.

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At Working Class Perspectives blog, Sarah Attfield has written a survey of various organizing efforts, and successes, around the world in 2018. It is one of the great things about Catholic social teaching that its commitment to solidarity and other core principles have universal application. As the year comes to a close, let me tip my hat to the good people at Georgetown's Kalmanowitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor who produce this blog. In the best tradition of Catholic intellectual life, they do great work and make the rest of us look smarter than we are.

In the Washington Post, Carlos Lozada reviews three books by conservative "Never Trumpers." His review is brutal and it deserves to be, but he also seems inalert to the possibility of conversion. I welcome these Republicans who mistakenly made Trump possible into the ranks of the enlightened and the humane. Nonetheless, this paragraph is devastatingly smart and on point:

> With these books, the Never Trumpers are engaging in a worthy exercise, even if it's one they are executing with varying degrees of consistency, clarity and introspection. Yet it took the nomination and election of Donald Trump to make it happen. In a sense, the Never Trumpers are also the Only Trumpers. Only with the rise of Trump did they even think to interrogate the conservative dogma they'd long defended. Only with Trump did they begin to reconsider their roles in feeding a frenzied base. Only with Trump did they see the need to reach for higher ideals.

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

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