Opinion

News



President Donald Trump delivers his second State of the Union address Feb. 5 at the Capitol in Washington. (CNS/Doug Mills, pool via Reuters)



by Michael Sean Winters

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In the era of Donald Trump, it is sometimes easy to forget that the purpose of government is governance, not entertainment. The depressing saga that is the Mueller probe, though intended to enforce the law and, indeed, to defend the rule of law, dribbles out its characters and plot twists like a very slow-moving novel. The president's Twitter rants and his speeches at campaign rallies read like the script of a B movie about the leader of a banana republic. The Democrats engage in self-immolation worthy of a 19th-century Italian opera, determined to present themselves as the party of late-term abortion and transgender bathrooms. The mainstream media plays along, chasing the latest micro developments in these story lines and largely ignoring substantive policy issues.

Yet, underneath this tiring and tiresome drama, the government of the United States must act, and the decisions it makes have real-life consequences on the lives of the governed.

Nowhere are the real-life consequences of government action more obvious than in the Trump administration's despicable hostility to immigrants. The good people at Hope Border Institute recently hosted a summit to highlight the inhumane treatment to which immigrants are exposed by this administration, and held an interfaith service at the border fence.

The sins against human dignity being perpetrated by this administration are many. It is refusing to work toward a permanent solution for the "Dreamers," who were brought to this country as children, and for those who received temporary protected status, coming from countries devastated by natural or manmade disasters. The U.S. bishops have urged protections for both. The administration, focused as it is on preventing people from entering the country, has failed to care even for the children in its custody.

The administration has done nothing to expedite the asylum claims of those fleeing violence, which is to say, people who are trying to enter the U.S. legally. In fact, Trump is proposing to close all foreign offices of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which will make it even harder for people who wish to reunite with their families and also slow-walk foreign adoptions. The administration says it will save

millions by shuttering these offices, at the same time as Trump is requesting billions for his border wall.



Construction workers in the U.S. work on a new section of the border wall as seen from Tijuana, Mexico, Feb.18. (CNS/Reuters/Jorge Duenes)

During his campaign, Trump distinguished himself from his rivals by promising never to cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid, but his most recent budget proposal cuts all three. Budgets submitted by presidents tend to be dead on arrival on Capitol Hill, but given the fact that virtually every Republican senator has declined to stand up to this president on anything, the cuts will serve as a marker in negotiations between the two chambers of Congress. My only hope, and it is a reasonable one, is that Trump's flip-flop will not sit well with some of his supporters, especially older voters who rely on both Medicare and Social Security. Other cuts in domestic spending may survive in order to balance out a rejection of these proposed cuts.

Again, these budgetary proposals are not likely to be passed, but taken merely as a proposal they reflect the administration's desires and also represent a rejection of

one of the central pillars of Catholic social teaching, the common good. In a press release, Meg Olson, grassroots mobilization manager for the Network lobby for Catholic social justice, panned the budget: "The Catholic Sisters and activists of NETWORK urge Congress to reject the Trump Administration's abandonment of affordable housing, healthcare, Medicaid, SNAP, and an accurate 2020 Census — and instead create a faithful budget that invests in the common good."

She warned against taking any solace in the fact that the budget is unlikely to pass, saying, "At NETWORK, we are concerned that President Trump will once again bypass Congress in order to institute the scorched earth policies presented in his Fiscal Year 2020 budget. It is critical that Congress and the people of the United States prepare to block these attacks on the common good."

A president has significant discretionary powers apart from the budget to enact his or her vision of American society. Trump's vision, as revealed in the budget, is horrifying.

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No one should be surprised by the fact that Trump's budget aims to severely cut back on research into climate change. He doesn't believe in it, although, as I never tire of saying, no one *believes* in climate change. It is science. The whole point is that it is not a matter of belief. As in the other cuts, Trump may not get everything he wants, but so long as Republicans in the Senate support his proposals, the eventual compromise with House Democrats will move the country in the wrong direction on this most pressing of issues. At National Geographic, the editors are keeping a running list of the different ways Trump is wrecking sound environmental policies, and National Geographic is not MSNBC.

For the past two years, Trump has taken credit for a booming economy with historically low unemployment numbers. I always think we give a sitting president too much blame for a bad economy and too much credit for a good one, but Trump was happy to take the credit. Now, however, the economy has begun to slow. The latest report on retail sales was anemic, as was the February jobs report. The federal deficit is projected to be $1 trillion this year. And the stock market resembles a rollercoaster. Will he take the blame as the economy sours?

During the campaign, candidate Trump said we would be tired of winning. Are you tired of winning? In virtually every metric of good governance suggested by Catholic social teaching, and even by the metrics the president set for himself during the campaign, this administration is worse than a failure. It is a disgrace.

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

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