Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @michaelswinters

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

October 22, 2019
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

From the file labeled "Hillary Clinton, go away!" — a file destined to get much larger — the former secretary of state essentially accused U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of being a Russian stooge. It is the measure of Clinton's tone deafness that such an allegation merely adds to the noise that President Donald Trump needs to muddy the impeachment waters rising to his knees. And Gabbard is one of the also-rans having very little impact on the race, who was hopefully going to disappear into well-earned obscurity. Until Clinton just gave her more air time than she has gotten in months. Politico has the story.

In the New Yorker, Eliza Griswold writes about an effort to "Teaching Democrats to speak Evangelical." Griswold repeats the myth that evangelicals became involved in politics in the early '70s in response to *Roe* v. *Wade*. In fact, they only got involved in the late '70s when the federal government threatened the tax-exempt status of their segregated Christian schools, and Republican operatives saw potential in their ranks. Nonetheless, the effort to reach out to religious voters is a no-brainer for Democrats, and Griswold shows the effects such efforts had in the past: Shifting a few percentage points of this determined voting bloc can make a difference in key

swing states.

For NCR readers in the Boston area who are interested in the role of religion in politics, on Monday I will be participating in a panel discussion at Boston College's Boisi Center for Religion and American Life. The topic: "Do the Democrats have a Religion Problem?" Registration is required, but the event is free and open to the public. Joining me on the panel are Mark Silk from Trinity College and Peter Skerry from Boston College, with Cathleen Kaveny of Boston College moderating. Hope to see you there.

In The Washington Post, Marc A. Thiessen argues that the rise of Sen. Elizabeth Warren in the polls is good news for Republicans. Thiessen is a Republican apologist, so it is hard to know if he is being sincere or not. But, if you were so inclined, you could find hundreds of columns by Democratic pundits in the 2016 cycle hoping they would be facing Donald Trump because he would be so easy to defeat. The same kinds of columns appeared in 1980 about Ronald Reagan and in 1992 about Bill Clinton. The lesson: Be careful what you wish for.

Advertisement

This is not the most weighty of issues raised by Trump's dealings with Ukraine, but it is the kind of news item that is easy to grasp and that gives the lie to Trump's claim to be cleaning up the Washington swamp on behalf of the American people: Gordon Sondland, the ambassador to the European Union, spent $1 million of taxpayer money renovating the ambassador's residence in Brussels. The Post has the story.

At America, Meghan J. Clark on "Porgy and Bess," both how and why it has always, always caused controversy. I had no idea that Gershwin insisted on a cast of all black singers, I just knew I always loved the music. And such music.

At RealClearPolitics, Peter Berkowitz considers the development of, and delineation among, rights, focusing specifically on a new book by Eric Foner which, in turn, examines the mid-19th century developments in constitutional law both before and after the Civil War. Berkowitz is right to be concerned about the ways the average American views these foundational issues, as partisans of both left and right, depending on the issue, seem indifferent to rights they find inconvenient at the

moment.

In The New York Times, Timothy Egan gives us an appetizer of his forthcoming book on making a pilgrimage. I am generally not a fan of the genre — spiritual searching is not my cup of tea — but the guy writes beautifully as this short graph indicates:

> In the vacuous tumult of the Trump era, I was looking for something durable: a stiff shot of no-nonsense spirituality. I'm a skeptic by profession, an Irish Catholic by baptism, culture and upbringing — lapsed but listening, like half of all Americans of my family's faith.

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

Editor's note: *Don't miss out on Michael Sean Winters' latest. Sign up and we'll let you know when he publishes new Distinctly Catholic columns.*