Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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In The Washington Post, Dartmouth professor Brendan Nyhan explains how Democratic presidential candidate Tom Steyer's campaign ads contain a treasure trove of material for political scientists, all of it classified under the heading "bad ideas." I think it is worse than that. Steyer's campaign is built on bad ideas that poll well, but which have been known to be bad ideas for so long, it is not a stretch to say that Steyer is either deeply ignorant or he is peddling political snake oil.

Also available in the snake oil aisle is Attorney General William Barr. This article in Politico details some of his efforts to misrepresent the inspector general's report, just as he misrepresented the findings of the Mueller report. Should someone tell him that lying is intrinsically evil? Barr claims that it is "still possible" that the investigation into the Trump campaign was undertaken in bad faith. It is also still possible the moon is made of cheese, I suppose. This man is an embarrassment to his profession.

Speaking of deceit, some of the reporting in this election cycle is really outrageous. This article in The Washington Post by Annie Linskey explains that Sen. Elizabeth Warren made $1.9 million advising clients, some of them corporations. But you have

to wait until paragraph six to find out that that amount is stretched over 30 years, that is to say, an average of $65,000 a year. While most of it was earned after she joined the faculty at Harvard Law School, that still represents a 17-year span. Now, $65,000 is a lot of money to me, and to most voters, but I wonder how it compares to other law school professors. What is worse, Linskey mentions Enron, a company that was the object of an enormous scandal in 2001. Warren, the article notes, worked for one of the company's creditors, that is, someone who had been fleeced by Enron. Linskey fails to mention that Warren also advised Enron employees and did so pro bono.

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Television media is often just as bad. Yamiche Alcindor at PBS NewsHour did a segment Dec. 2 that managed to mention Montana Gov. Steve Bullock's decision to drop out, Sen. Cory Booker explaining why he is not doing better in the polls, a gauzy ad by Mayor Pete Buttigieg, etc. Alcindor found time to mention that former Pennsylvania Congressman Joe Sestak had quit the race bringing to mind Chesterton's observation that "Journalism largely consists in saying Lord Jones is dead to people who never knew Lord Jones was alive." Who did not get mentioned once in Alcindor's segment? Sen. Bernie Sanders who is and has been in the top tier of candidates since the contest began.

In The New York Times, Nate Cohn looks at the changes to the Democratic primary calendar and what that could portend for the nominating process. The fact that the calendar has been advanced is not such a good thing: A longer primary season allows voters to make a course correction if someone who did well at the beginning shows weakness later on. And a primary that makes the contest more representative of the Democratic Party electorate may make it less representative of the national electorate. That said, I still think the terms of the race will be set *before* Super Tuesday.

From the Union Leader, the monks of St. Anselm's Abbey are suing the college they started because of concerns about the current board of trustees. I am reminded of something my pastor told me as a teenager: "Never trust a Benedictine. They have too much time to pray." This is going to get ugly.

At On the Media, Commonweal's Matthew Sitman demonstrates yet again that he is one of the rising intellectual stars among the up and coming generation of Catholic thinkers as he explains, and decimates, the Catholic right and its decision to go with the Trump flow.

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

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