Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Wow. Just wow. The couple who own the now-famous wine cave where Mayor Pete Buttigieg held a fundraiser are upset. Not because they have encountered tough times. Not because wildfires destroyed their vineyard. Not because of some tragedy has befallen them. No, Craig Hall and his wife, Kathryn Walt Hall, are upset because "They're making me out to be something that's not true. And they picked the wrong pawn. It's just not fair." Having given $2.4 million to Democratic causes and candidates over the years, they resent that their wine cave has become a symbol of something wrong in politics. Ms. Hall, incidentally, served as ambassador to Austria during Bill Clinton's tenure. Clueless in CAPS. The New York Times has the story.

One of the attendees at said wine cave fundraiser, Bill Wehrle, took to the pages of the Washington Post to complain that the event had been misrepresented. He noted that the hostess for the evening, Kathryn Walt Hall, served as an ambassador under both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. You might think that meant she was a career foreign service officer? No, she stayed on in 2001 until Bush named a replacement, which is not exactly the same thing. Wehrle also downplays the idea that the room was full of rich people because he made his $2,800 contribution in stages and his partner teaches at a community college. That's great. But, he is still missing the

point. Mayor Pete has plans to change and revivify politics once elected, but he fails to do the one thing he can do right now to change the nature of our political system: Stop linking access to money.

Republican efforts to suppress the vote are despicable and they vitiate any claim that the GOP has about valuing democracy. Should we be surprised that, when caught on audiotape admitting that this is how they work, a Trump campaign lawyer did what his boss did, just deny the truth of what we had just heard. I am only surprised he was not speaking in Russian.

What level of sycophancy is needed to work for the president? After he was roundly criticized for suggesting the late Rep. John Dingell was in hell, "looking up," his spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham told ABC News, "You'd have to talk to the president about that. He was at a political rally. He has been under attack, and under impeachment attack, for the last few months, and then just under attack politically for the last two-and-a-half years. I think that as we all know, the president is a counter-puncher." George Stephanopoulos had already spent the first half of the interview correcting several lies Grisham told, but don't you wish he has asked, "Ms. Grisham, if the president is a counter-puncher, how did a dead man throw the first punch"? Watch the interview. I have known some good liars in my time, but this was something.

In the New Yorker, a small town in Kentucky gets broadband internet and turns the possibilities for its citizens on their head. The fact that for eight years in office Barack Obama never made it a priority to supply broadband to rural parts of the country goes a long way toward explaining why President Donald Trump is in the White House.

A bit of good news, but news that needs watching: in a historic reversal of a trend dating back to the middle of the last century, more people are now dying in their own homes than in hospitals. But, more needs to be done to prepare families to prepare to have a dying patient in the house, and to help them get through it. Still, the impersonal nature of hospitals, and the desperate attempts to employ extraordinary means to keep people alive, both argue for the fact that this is a positive development.

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At Vox, another example of the left being ridiculous. Ian Millhiser wants to scare everyone about the "ministerial exemption" which prevents the government from interfering in employment cases involving those who engage in ministerial work at a religious institution. Millhiser apparently thinks it is easy to divide tasks into neat categories of "religious" or "secular" but it really is not so easy. Of course, the courts brought some of this on themselves by arguing that a nativity scene can serve a "secular purpose" if it has Santa and reindeer nearby. I remember reading a liberal intellectual make the argument that the bas relief of Moses in the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives was not endorsement of religion because Moses was the law giver, and that was a secular responsibility. Funny, I don't think Moses saw it that way. Sculptures of two popes are there also, Gregory IX and Innocent III. Were they involved in secular law giving?

Tomorrow Christmas begins. I hope everyone, and I mean everyone, has a very blessed Christmas season.

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

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