Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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At a town hall meeting, Sen. Elizabeth Warren gets asked about abortion by an evangelical voter. I disagree with her fundamental stance, but she did not demonize the question or the questioner, and, what is more, she moved to a bit of common ground, emphasizing the need to invest in children. If more Democrats shake off the extremism of Emily's List and talk respectfully to those with whom they disagree, more Democrats will win elections.

In The New York Times, a look at how President Donald Trump's 2017 tax overhaul continues to feed corporate coffers and balloon the national deficit. This is the kind of corruption that really destroys our democracy, not just the Ukrainian variety.

At Foreign Affairs, Miatta Fahnbulleh examines the collapse of neoliberalism and offers an alternative economic vision. What Fahnbulleh lacks, however, is the moral language necessary to convince people to embrace the specific policy ideas she promotes, especially when it comes to the issue of climate change where the moral stakes are so palpable and one side really is merely placing its own economic self-interest ahead of the health of the planet and the prospects for future generations.

At Salon, Heather Digby Parton hyperventilates about Attorney General Bill Barr and his religious ideas. She did not have to turn to illiberal ideologues like Katherine Stewart and Caroline Fredrickson, who accused Barr of wanting a theocracy or a one-religion state, a charge that is ludicrous. It brings to mind memories of Paul Blanshard and Norman Vincent Peale in the 1950s alleging that Catholics cannot be good citizens. Barr does not want a theocracy, but his speech at Notre Dame was still lousy. Funny they quote him highlighting the "utilitarian" value of "Judeo-Christian moral standards" and do not even recognize the irony.

At RNS, former director of the White House faith-based office, Melissa Rogers makes the counter-argument to the claim that Trump is a champion of religious liberty. Her essay suggests a question for one of the presidential debates. She writes: "An administration certainly does not have to grant every free exercise claim to be a bona fide proponent of religious freedom. But it is striking to see how differently free exercise claims are treated when they do not align with the administration's policy priorities." The debate question: Can you name an instance when you would protect the religious liberty claims of a religious organization that was seeking an exemption from one of your policies?

In the Chicago Tribune, a report on the Kolbe House ministry of the Chicago Archdiocese, which tends to the spiritual needs of prisoners in the Windy City. It is good to remind people, including many RCs, that there are things in our culture, instances of mercy and examples of justice, that would simply not exist without the efforts of what they deride as "the institutional church."

The Dallas Morning News offered some of its predictions for the new year. I doubt very much that Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi will ever serve as U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. And I sure hope they are wrong about Pete "Let me put the Pete back into petit bourgeois" Buttigieg becoming president.

Speaking of the now-former mayor, Politico shares how Buttigieg defended his suitability for the job of president in the wake of the assassination of Qassem Soleimani by citing his military experience. As I have noted before, this is bunk. We all know people who were veterans who we would not want running the country. Buttigieg's military service speaks well of his values, not his judgment, and pretending otherwise questions his, well, judgment.

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

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