Opinion

News



Central American migrants are seen inside an enclosure in El Paso, Texas, March 27, 2019. (CNS/Reuters/Jose Luis Gonzalez)



by Michael Sean Winters

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From "Frontline," a powerful but remarkably sad look at the city of El Paso, Texas, the effects of President Donald Trump's immigration policies, and how it came to be targeted by a white supremacist murderer. Among those interviewed is Dylan Corbett, director of the Hope Border Institute and one of the outstanding laymen in the U.S. Catholic Church.

At Politico, Alice Miranda Ollstein makes the argument that the worst option for health care is to do nothing at all, and that the Democratic divide, with Sen. Bernie Sanders and Sen. Elizabeth Warren supporting Medicare for All and former Vice President Joe Biden and Mayor Pete Buttigieg only willing to pursue a public option, elides the problems with keeping the system as it is. Yes, Medicare for All will cost trillions of dollars, but it will cost much less than current trajectories, which come to $52 trillion in the course of a decade. I would add that Biden's and Buttigieg's attacks on Medicare for All are the principal reasons the cost of doing nothing has been ignored.

That said, and also at Politico, I deprecate the left's "whack-a-Joe" tactics. I do not think Biden can beat Trump because he is running the same campaign Hillary Clinton did, focusing on his experience in Washington, no recognition of the disastrous trade policies he supported, and years of being funded by corporate interests. But he is also a decent man and he deserves to be treated with respect. Some of these woke progressives need to go back to sleep.

Also at Politico, Alex Thompson discusses what he terms Warren's "surprising" closing argument: electability. Regular readers of Distinctly Catholic will not be surprised. Since the beginning of last year, I have noted that Biden seemed intent on running the same kind of campaign that John Kerry ran in 2004 and Mitt Romney ran in 2012. Buttigieg is perhaps even more in this mold. To defeat an incumbent, you have to find a way to make the election about more than the incumbent. Thompson is right to highlight the importance of being the second choice of other candidates. In the Iowa caucuses, many voters will begin the caucus backing a candidate who does not pass the 15% threshold. At that point, they get to go and caucus with supporters of their second choice.

In The Washington Post, E.J. Dionne looks at the dynamics of the race going into tonight's debate, the last before Iowa voters go to caucus on Feb. 3. I agree that Trump's attacks on Biden have likely helped Biden in the short term, but I confess his son Hunter Biden's ethics stink to high heaven. Like Prince Harry and Meghan, he wanted to be independent but he trafficked in the family name to get there.

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Also in The Washington Post, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced his state would become the first to bar the resettlement of refugees under a new Trump administration policy that allows states to refuse to take in any refugees. Democrats — and anyone concerned about the fate of immigrants — are well-advised to always, every time, refer to this as the "states' rights" policy. To make matters worse, Abbott is a practicing Catholic.

In The New York Times, a report on hackers breaking into the computers of Travelex, which manages those currency counters and kiosks you see in every international airport. I always go to the counter and exchange currency with a person, avoiding the necessity of inserting a bankcard into a computer at the kiosk. Once again, we have an example of why the rush to embrace robotics and artificial intelligence has a ton of unintended consequences that need to be thought through. In the meantime, think twice before you put your information into any computer.

From WBUR, how a sports writer's disastrous headline cost him his job and how a downtown church with a noonday Mass led him to the priesthood. The money quote about attending Mass in the middle of the workday in a busy city: "And it's this oasis of stillness and silence and ritual, and it was just such a sharp contrast that it called to me."

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

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