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

February 27, 2020
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

At Commonweal, David Bentley Hart offers three cheers for socialism, with a devastating critique of the cheap and largely stupid attacks being hurled at Sen. Bernie Sanders. His opening about the power of stupidity is stunning:

> At the level of the social phenotype (so to speak), the qualities often most conducive to survival are prejudice, simplemindedness, blind loyalty, and a militant want of curiosity. These are the virtues that fortify us against doubt or fatal hesitation in moments of crisis. Subtlety and imagination, by contrast, often enfeeble the will; ambiguities dull the instincts. So while it is true that American political thought in the main encompasses a ludicrously minuscule range of live options and consists principally in slogans rather than ideas, this is not necessarily a defect. In a nation's struggle to endure and thrive, unthinking obduracy can be a precious advantage.

Brilliant. Snobby, but brilliant.

In The New York Times, Thomas L. Friedman offers a truly lousy idea: He wants Sanders or former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg to announce a party-unifying "team of rivals" Cabinet. Here is the problem. Friedman names five incumbent Democratic senators — six if Bloomberg is the nominee and is naming Sanders to the Cabinet. That means five or six special elections to fill Senate seats a year or two into the next presidency. You will recall that after Sen. Edward Kennedy died in 2009, having represented the bluest state of the nation, in the special election to fill his seat, a Republican, Scott Brown, won the seat. Newly elected presidents almost always have trouble with the next midterm. Why would you throw five or six seats into the bargain?

I should have been clearer on Monday about the effect of the stock market on perceptions of the nation's economic health and how those perceptions relate to President Donald Trump's approval rating. Even though most Americans do not own stocks, and so it is not necessarily an indicator of how they are doing economically, it is the only daily economic indicator. We get jobs numbers once a month, and GDP numbers once a quarter. I wrote of how the stock market's "robust growth feeds the Trump narrative every day." The present tense. I wrote those words last Friday morning. Monday and Tuesday of this week, the stock market tanked as fear of the coronavirus spread. Or did the virus provide the occasion for a much-anticipated market correction? No matter the cause, guess what? Trump's approval rating, which had been ticking up all year, has dropped a full point, according to FiveThirtyEight.com.

In The Washington Post, Dana Milbank opens his analysis of the state of the Democratic contest by quoting from different attacks on Sanders at Tuesday night's debate. Not all attacks are the same. The former mayors, Pete Buttigieg and Bloomberg, and businessman Tom Steyer all auditioned for the role of Democratic demagogue. Milbank should have distinguished them from the others, which were standard-fare attacks. But Milbank is right that the Democrats may be mirroring the GOP in 2016 when the establishment hoped that other candidates would get out of the race so that Trump's plurality victories would no longer be enough to win. The problem? Whatever their differences, politicians on both sides of the aisle are egomaniacs and they do not leave the campaign when they lose hope. They leave the campaign when they run out of money.

Advertisement

Good news for the Democrats? Sen. Chuck Schumer met with Montana Gov. Steve Bullock to hopefully convince him to run for the U.S. Senate. The popular Democrat in a ruby-red state would instantly become the Democrats' best chance to pick up a seat in the upper chamber. Bullock may have bombed in the presidential contest, but he remains popular in his home state. There is the prospect of Montana sending two Democrats to the Senate — Sen. Jon Tester won reelection two years ago.

Looking for a silver lining in the Democrats' immoral opposition to legislation that would ban late-term abortions? Two Democratic senators — Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Bob Casey of Pennsylvania — voted for the bill. A second measure — requiring doctors to care for a child born alive after a botched abortion — garnered three Democratic votes as Sen. Doug Jones of Alabama joined the other two. So, the next time you ask a Democrat if there is room in the party for pro-lifers, you might add that any hope of retaking the Senate and retiring Majority Leader Mitch McConnell would be virtually impossible if such a litmus test were actually applied.

[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.*