Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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I am beginning to think we need a constitutional amendment to add "criminal negligence" to the enumerated high crimes and misdemeanors for which a president can be impeached. This letter from the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living to the nation's governors explains why we can anticipate further outbreaks of COVID-19 at nursing homes. The first item on their list is inadequate testing, precisely the kind of thing the president should have been working on while the country was shut down in March, April and May.

Relatedly, where is the voice of the U.S. bishops' Pro-Life Activities Committee on this subject? They have been fighting assisted suicide for years. I also note that there was no statement from Pro-Life Activities Chairman Archbishop Joseph Naumann on Tuesday, when the federal government conducted its first execution in 23 years. Last month, when Attorney General Bill Barr announced plans to resume federal executions, the statement from the bishops' conference was signed by Archbishop Paul Coakley, chair of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development. Where is Naumann?

Last week, in discussing a Supreme Court decision about the extent of the ministerial exception, I raised the issue of adding administrative law provisions to

the canon law of the church. Here is a 2009 NCR article about how the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis created a system that achieved some of the goals such administrative law provisions would implement.

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The Federalist Society's influence on the selection of federal judges and justices is well documented, and most of the concern about that influence focuses on the culture war issues that come before the court. But the group is also publishing these short videos that seem designed to undermine the idea of social justice, or define it in such a way that it does not challenge any of the libertarian economic policies that have held sway since the Thatcherite-Reaganite policy revolution. Here is Yaron Brook of the Ayn Rand Society creating straw men in order to discredit the idea of equality. For all the tears being shed by some conservatives about the fact that Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts joined the court's four liberal justices on some key votes, I doubt you will see him voting to expand Commerce Clause jurisprudence.

At Politico, news that the Biden campaign is taking out ads in Texas, a state that has not awarded its electoral college votes to a Democrat since Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford in 1976. This reminds me of a conversation I had with a Texas bishop in 2011. The census figures had come out, and I said that it seemed to me that the rising Latino population of the state meant that it would become a Democratic state within 20 years. "Ten," he replied. If Biden wins Texas, I shall buy that bishop dinner.

At The Hill, a report on a Koch-backed group leading the effort to prevent the federal government from assisting states and localities whose budgets have been crushed under the weight of the coronavirus pandemic. I wonder if their tune will change now that states led by GOP governors like Arizona, Florida and Texas have become the hot spots. Every time you see the influence of the Kochs, remember the shameful way The Catholic University of America feted one of the brothers, Charles, after he gave a large donation to the Tim and Steph Busch School of Business and Economics.

From AP, a horrific story about the Chinese government's use of contraception, abortion and sterilization against the Uighur minority. In our country, we talk about "reproductive rights," but let's recall that these procedures have along been

associated with eugenics also, starting with Margaret Sanger's praise for Malthusian ideas when she started Planned Parenthood. I am always shocked to think that the United Nations Population Fund calls attention to the problem, but they can't bring themselves to even mention the word "abortion."

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

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