Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Anne Applebaum at The Atlantic examines Fox News host Laura Ingraham's descent from Reagan-era optimist to Trump-era Sturm und Drang. The money quote:

> At some point in the intervening years, her Reaganite optimism slowly hardened into something better described as a form of apocalyptic pessimism. This can be found in much of what she says and writes nowadays: America is doomed, Europe is doomed, Western civilization is doomed — and immigration, political correctness, transgenderism, the culture, the establishment, the left, and the "Dems" are responsible. Some of what she sees is real. The so-called cancel culture on the internet, the extremism that sometimes flares up on university campuses and newsrooms, and the exaggerated claims of those who practice identity politics are a political and cultural problem that will require real bravery to fight. But it is no longer clear that she thinks these forms of left-wing extremism can be fought using normal democratic politics.

I try to watch a little bit of all three Fox News primetime anchors every night to see what they are saying, and Ingraham is the scariest by far. On the other hand, Applebaum is just the kind of right-of-center anti-extremist this country needs more of. (We need more left-of-center anti-extremists to exhibit the "real bravery" Applebaum calls for as well!)

At Politico, a reminder that Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan might be a moderate who is occasionally willing to stand up to Donald Trump, but he is still a Republican who makes bad decisions. Hogan cancelled plans for a rail line connecting some predominantly black neighborhoods with the both the city center and suburban job centers. The Obama administration had given the state $900 million for the project. Hogan cancelled it, returned that money and poured the state's contribution into building more highways.

At CNBC, JPMorgan Chase's Jamie Dimon admits that he is not sure what to expect from the economy through the rest of the year, but he is becoming more pessimistic. "The word unprecedented is rarely used properly," he observed. "This time it's being used properly." Investors hate uncertainty, and while the coronavirus has introduced a great deal of uncertainty, other countries have tamed the virus and we haven't, so there is more uncertainty here than there should be. Who can look at the president's behavior and predicate it on anything rational?

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Reported in The New York Times, the Rio Grande Valley is seeing an outbreak of COVID-19 cases. Because of the poverty in the region and the presence of many preexisting health issues — 60% of the population is diabetic or prediabetic — you have the makings of a tragedy. It makes for grim reading, and it also prompts a question: The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been very vocal about poverty and about the dignity of human life over the years. Now that these two issues are so clearly and obviously paired, where is the moral outrage? Where is the Pro-Life Activities Committee?

In The Washington Post, Molly Roberts looks at how Dr. Anthony Fauci became the most successful bureaucrat in Washington, surviving six presidencies and all the while doing right by the nation. His task was exceptionally challenging, as she writes:

> Science and partisan politics seem, in our era, inherently in conflict. One runs on fact-centered reality, the other on point-scoring spin. Yet Fauci more than any other figure has brokered a generational peace between the two worlds.

I would add that Roberts also provides a master class in long-form journalism along the way.

In The New York Times, Michelle Goldberg wades into the debate about "cancel culture" and the illiberalism of the left, drawing some important distinctions and considering a range of opinions. She also comes down clearly in support of the commitment to freedom of expression as a bedrock liberal value, and warns against the "self-censorship and grudging conformity" that can infect academic and journalistic life when anyone, left or right, goes on a "heretic-hunting" spree. But she introduces complications that some of us more doctrinaire liberals need to consider even if, in the end, we stick to our doctrinaire position.

Also in the Times, an article of an entirely different sort: Annik LaFarge writes about her penchant for attending free noontime organ recitals around the city. I love the fact that different people come to this greatest of instruments in so many different ways. My only fault is that she fails to acknowledge the organ builders who made the two instruments she highlights in the article. The four-manual organ at Grace Church on Broadway was built by Taylor and Boody, and the organ at St. Paul's Chapel at Trinity Parish is by Fritz Noack. One of the great privileges of my life was to work as a gopher for the great organ builder John Brombaugh one summer when he installed his Opus 21 at St. Mark's Chapel in Storrs, Connecticut.

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

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