Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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September 24, 2020
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We are familiar with agitprop issuing from the pen of conservative columnist Marc Thiessen, but I was surprised The Washington Post published his essay yesterday that actually contained textbook, KGB-quality disinformation. For example, he claims the Democrats will increase the number of representatives in the U.S. House. "Since House seats are apportioned by population, populous blue states would gain the most — and because the size of the electoral college is determined by the size of each state's congressional delegation, this would increase the number of blue-state electors as well." Texas and Florida are the second and third most populous states, and they are not blue. What is more, any increase in the number of House seats would disproportionately reward those states near the cusp of gaining another seat, that is a state with a population that fell just short of gaining another seat at the expense of some other state that is just above the cutoff. It could be Utah or Georgia as likely as it would be New York or Illinois.

How do you say "chutzpah" in Latin? The National Catholic Register reports on a poll commissioned by its parent company, EWTN, and RealClearPolitics. The biggest, immediate news is that Joe Biden is leading President Donald Trump among Catholic voters by a margin of 53% to 41%, and you learn that in the 21st paragraph of the

story. The biggest mediate news is that after bundles of money and press releases and "Fortnights for Freedom," Catholics did not rank religious liberty among their top 10 issue concerns. Abortion did not crack the top 10, "preeminent" notwithstanding. Talk about burying your ledes!

I was somewhat sympathetic toward San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone when he voiced concerns about the restrictions on Mass attendance. The City by the Bay has the strictest limits in California — only 25 people at a liturgy, regardless of the size of the church — and even if they were not designed to aggravate religious people, I am not sure why this city needs such restrictions when Los Angeles and San Jose and San Diego do not. But then Cordileone went on Fox News and delivered a sermon outside his cathedral that reminded me how deep his culture warrior tendencies run. Your Grace: Sermons are intended to break open the word of God, not a political rally.

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By way of comparison, when religious leaders set aside the culture war approach and develop relationships with civil leaders, good things can happen and the common good can be served. Recently, in Chicago, Mayor Lori Lightfoot attended the opening of DePaul College Prep's new campus. WGNTV covered the event, and the mayor talks about her gratitude to the Catholic Church in the Windy City starting at 4:10 in the video. Does Lightfoot see all issues the way the Catholic Church does? Of course not. But I am betting she will always give us a respectful hearing.

At Politico, a report on one of the many dangers related to relying on mail-in voting: Sometimes people do not follow directions. In Pennsylvania, a court ruled against the commonwealth's secretary of state, who had previously told election officials to go ahead and count so-called "naked ballots," that is, an absentee ballot not enclosed in the first, unmarked envelope, but simply returned their ballot inside the signed, outer envelope. The requirement of two envelopes, an outer signed one and an inner unsigned one, is to protect voter privacy, so nothing about a "naked ballot" robs it of its manifest intent. But such issues will stalk this election.

In the New York Times, a look at GOP senators doing Olympic-quality, rhetorical somersaults to explain why it was an affront to democracy to vote on a Supreme Court nominee nine months before the 2016 election, but not an affront to

democracy to vote on a nomination six weeks before the 2020 election.

Also in the Times, Thomas Edsall looks at voter registration in key swing states. In Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, voter registration is up by 6 points but net Democratic registration is down by 38%. Non-college white registration is up 46%. I am not going to go back and count the number of times I noted that the Democratic presidential candidates needed to spend less time talking about their plans to forgive college loan debt and more time discussing what they would do for the millions of kids who do not go to college. I sincerely hope I do not have to say, "I told you so," on the morrow of a Trump victory. Edsall's observations about the Latino vote are important too.

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

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