Opinion

News



Following President Donald Trump's announcement he tested positive for the coronavirus disease, workers in Sanford, Florida, pull down signage at Orlando Sanford International Airport where the president was to have a rally Oct. 2. (CNS/Reuters/Phelan Ebenhack)



by Michael Sean Winters

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Last week, I linked to a fine essay by Matthew Sitman at Commonweal raising questions about Judge Amy Coney Barrett's nomination. Now, Rick Garnett has replied at Mirror of Justice. It is never fun to be umpire when two friends are arguing, but this is an easy call: Garnett accuses Sitman of gaslighting but then lights a few lamps himself. For example, he notes with rhetorical relish that the upcoming court challenge to the Affordable Care Act is not a vehicle for overturning the ACA. Sitman did not say it was, he merely noted her hostility to the ACA. But the larger question is this: Sitman is undoubtedly correct that simply because some people have shown anti-Catholic bigotry in discussing Barrett's nomination does not mean there are no legitimate questions to ask on the subject. These conservatives keep saying that it is wrong to discuss Barrett's religion, but they keep bringing it up. I smell something fishy in these full-throated defenses of Barrett.

At Politico, David Siders reports on President Donald Trump's last campaign rally, in Duluth, Minnesota, before being diagnosed with coronavirus and admitted to Walter Reed Hospital. He writes:

> The rally was a story of worst practices in a pandemic, with Duluth as the collateral damage. Before Trump's hospitalization and wall-to-wall coverage of his evolving condition, it was in Duluth that the recklessness of his campaign fell plainly into view — from his scoffing at mask-wearing to his insistence on assembling large crowds.

The sad thing is you can remove the words "pandemic" and Duluth, and swap in "governance" and "United States of America," and what do you have? The opening of a biography of the nation's 45th president. The environment, race relations, income equality, migrants and their families — the list of collateral damage goes on and on.

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Relatedly, and from The Washington Post, an account of Secret Service agents appalled by the president's decision to drive by his supporters outside the hospital on Sunday, putting agents at risk of contracting the virus. I have little sympathy for the maskless attendees at the Barrett nomination rollout, and none for those who attended a fundraiser for the president in New Jersey. But what about the waiters and bartenders and Secret Service personnel and the Marines at the foot of the steps to Marine Corps One? Why should their health be imperiled because of this reckless narcissist? There is a legal term for his behavior, and maybe all those lawyers at the Barrett nomination event could apply it here: reckless endangerment.

Where would we be without The New Yorker? In an important article, Paul Elie rightly notes that President Donald Trump and Attorney General William Barr are benefitting from a long-term project, the consolidation of power by conservative Catholics. The money quote:

> Their long project attempts to establish a synthesis between the hierarchical order of Catholic truths and what they call the "American experiment in ordered liberty." In supporting Trump and Barr, they also are squarely in the tradition of arch-conservative Catholicism as a force of resistance to democratic governance — one that runs from pre-Revolutionary France to Franco's Spain and nineteen-sixties Latin America. They share a contempt for liberalism and a corresponding belief in public order as the basis for civil society.

A few years ago, I would have dismissed such comments as the result of a fevered imagination, but watching Barr's performance the past few years, such horrific ideas ring true

Also at The New Yorker, this article by Ed Caesar looks into newly released documents from Trump's favorite bank, Deutsche Bank. The cutline under the photograph reads: "Documents show that the bank used mirror trades to help major criminal organizations, terrorist groups, and drug cartels launder and transfer a geyser of dirty money." How did the editor refrain from adding: "And then there are all the groups not related to President Trump!"

At Reuters, a report on the pope's new encyclical contains a glaring mistake that explains a lot of what is wrong with American perceptions of Catholic teaching. The

article states, "Because it deals with social issues, 'Fratelli Tutti' is what is known as a social encyclical, as opposed to those about Church doctrine." No. A social encyclical applies Catholic doctrine to social issues. This is worse than sloppy.

When we think of the Latino vote, we normally think of California, Florida, Arizona and other southern and southwestern states. But this story from NBC News looks at the "Latin corridor" in Pennsylvania's Amish country. There has been a significant Puerto Rican population in the area around Lancaster since the 1950s, but the population has swelled with refugees from the island after Hurricane Maria three years ago, as well as an influx of Hispanics from the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

Out of the mouth of babes, and sometimes lawyers! Attorneys for Fox News, defending the network and its primetime anchor Tucker Carlson in a slander suit, made the case, and the judge agreed, that viewers should not believe what Carlson is saying. "Fox persuasively argues, that given Mr. Carlson's reputation, any reasonable viewer 'arrive[s] with an appropriate amount of skepticism' about the statement he makes," according to the judge's ruling dismissing the suit. How can the corporation justify keeping Carlson on air? NPR has the story.

At The Iris, a newspaper run by high school students, Elliott Stephanopoulos, daughter of George, interviews supermodel Martha Hunt about her advocacy for people with scoliosis. Talk about not falling far from the tree!

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

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