Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Always nice to hear one of our own on NPR, but especially when it is Heidi Schlumpf on the radio network's signature news and analysis show "All Things Considered," and she is discussing NCR's powerful editorial calling for the U.S. Senate to reject the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court. Regrettably, not enough senators listened to Schlumpf, and the country will be saddled with Barrett on the high court for decades.

The wonderful news that Washington Archbishop Wilton Gregory is to be made a cardinal next month put me in mind of an article from nine years ago, George Weigel's essay at First Things titled "The End of the Bernardin Era." Everything about that article was wrong, but it is especially delicious to see that it has been proven wrong not just by arguments, but by events.

That said, most of the commentary and statements upon the selection of Gregory for this honor have focused on the fact that he is the first African-American cardinal. In a fit of humility, men "raised to the purple" will say that the pope has honored their city or their country by choosing them. In fact, the cardinalate has always been a personal honor, and it is even more so under Pope Francis, who has not bestowed

red hats on the incumbents of traditional cardinalatial sees like Venice and Turin.

At The New York Times, Ellora Derenoncourt and Claire Montialoux, two professors at the University of California at Berkeley, argue that raising the minimum wage will do more to reduce racial inequality than will inclusion and diversity programs at elite institutions. They make a compelling case, and I hope some of the beneficiaries of those latter programs at elite institutions will engage the argument, even if they end up disagreeing with it.

Also at the Times, I love it when their editorial writers catch up with Pope Pius XI. In this case, Paul Krugman has an essay titled, "When Libertarianism Goes Bad." Sorry, but it was bad when it started, as Pius wrote in 1931, "as from a poisoned spring."

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In The Washington Post, a look at the politics of climate change, prompted by Joe Biden's comment in the debate that we need to "transition from the oil industry." Two things jump out at me about this analysis. First, only in America is Biden's remark remarkable. Of course we have to transition away from fossil fuels. Second, politically, I think Biden has to find a way to make sure that men and women who work in the fossil fuel industry have first dibs on training in the sustainable energy industry. Ask people in West Virginia what happens to their jobs when the coal mine is exhausted or the oil well runs dry? Sustainable energy also creates millions of sustainable jobs. The politics is tricky, but it is not impossible.

The most frequent question I get this year is this: "Are the polls right?" My gut tells me that it has dawned on the pollsters themselves that if they get it wrong this time, their industry will be ruined, so they are trying really, really hard to get it right. And, we have to remember that when FiveThirtyEight says President Donald Trump wins 13% of the scenarios its models run, that is the same percentage that you will get a deuce if you roll a die. And that *does* happen. At the most recent podcast from FiveThirtyEight, Nate Silver and Galen Druke discuss the discrepancies between national, state and district-level polls. The bad news is that there are so many discrepancies between polls. The goods news? The state polls show former Biden winning by only 8 points, while the national polls show him winning by 10 points and the district-level polls suggest he could win by more than that.

One of the things that pollsters do not know how to figure out assuredly is how many people will show up and which ones. One thing we now know for sure: Millions of Americans are availing themselves of the opportunity to vote early. We do not know how many people never thought about that as an option until the pandemic hit, nor how many would have not voted on election day if, say, it rained. In the past 20 years, we have had some very, very close elections, so every vote really does count. And, in Florida and Texas this year, more people have voted already than the total number of votes President Donald Trump secured in winning those states four years ago.

"Saturday Night Live" had a great segment that contemplates life without Trump in the White House. I hate to admit it, but while Trump has been bad for the country, he has made the life of comedians and columnists soooo much easier.

Apparently, scientists have concluded that a glass of red wine can replace on hour of exercise. Now, as the pandemic has taught us, we need to follow the science. At my age, it is so easy to put on weight, so I was thinking of exercising two hours a day. I am thinking that means I get two glasses of wine at night, right? Love the science.

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

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