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President Joe Biden arrives at the White House in Washington Aug. 12 to discuss his Build Bac

President Joe Biden arrives at the White House in Washington Aug. 12 to discuss his Build Back Better agenda. (CNS/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)



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At Jacobin, staff writer Luke Savage asks: Is Wisconsin still a democracy? He looks at just how egregious some redistricting maps are, which, combined with efforts to take away enforcement power from non-partisan election boards and give it to those newly gerrymandered state legislatures, makes it likely Republicans in the Badger state can hold on to power even when they do not get a majority of the vote. In Ohio, a new congressional map aims to make sure Republicans win four-fifths of the congressional seats, even though Donald Trump only won the state with 53% of the vote.

At The Hill, John White, professor of politics at the Catholic University of America, discusses the theft of a painting at the law school chapel that portrayed a pietà with a Black Madonna cradling George Floyd. The theft is appalling, to be sure, but White

makes the larger point that the art, like the Catholic faith, provokes us to think, which is the point of a university. I have often been critical of CUA's president John Garvey, but he gets high marks for refusing to remove the painting when pressed to do so, before some vigilante took matters into their own hands. I hope the police find the culprit and throw the book at him.

Television's Dr. Mehmet Oz is running for the GOP nomination to replace Sen. Pat Toomey as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's junior senator. Oz is not a television doctor the way Robert Young, of "Marcus Welby, M.D." fame was, but it's close. Oz does have a medical degree, and from the University of Pennsylvania no less, but most medical professionals believe the advice he dispensed on TV was only correct about half of the time. And his time at med school was the only time in his life he lived in Pennsylvania, so he is a bit of a carpetbagger to boot. His candidacy became plausible because Trump's previous pick, Sean Parnell, dropped out of the race when he lost custody of his children in a bitter divorce dispute. If the stakes were not so high, it would be hard to take the Republican Party seriously.

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In The New York Times, a look at the health care provisions of the Build Back Better bill now before the Senate. It turns out that the Affordable Care Act, like most ambitious pieces of legislation, had some unintended consequences and that there are still gaps in coverage opportunities. The plan will go far toward filling in those gaps and getting closer to that day when health care coverage is truly universal. Glad to see the mainstream media talking about the policies in, and not just the price tag of, the Build Back Better bill.

At the Working-Class Perspectives blog, Georgetown University's Joseph McCartin writes about how the worker-created labor shortage, combined with private sector strikes we have not seen since the 1980s, and the pro-labor policies of the Biden administration are all changing the economic landscape in ways that will be difficult to roll back. If Congress can manage to pass the Build Back Better plan as well, which is filled with pro-worker policies, the outlook will be even brighter. Now, if the Dems will manage some message discipline, maybe the American people will notice that things are getting better.

From the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the full ceremony inducting Josephine Baker into the French Pantheon. The French really know how to do civic, secular liturgy better than anyone else and the flag-draped cenotaph was slowly carried up the Rue Soufflot, stopping for musical numbers before reaching the former church that now serves as the burial place of France's greatest citizens. Baker's remains are buried in Monaco and her family did not want them disturbed, so a cenotaph took the place of a coffin at the ceremony. The whole thing was quite moving.

Continuing our look at beautiful music of Advent, here is another hymn that focuses on the Second Coming: "Hark, a Thrilling Voice is Sounding." This hymn is more joyous and less ominous than "Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending" that we listened to Tuesday, especially when, as in this recording by the choir at Christ Church in Bronxville, New York, it is accompanied by a brass quintet. Just stunning.