Opinion
NCR Voices



U.S. President-elect Donald Trump speaks after a meeting with Republicans in Congress at the U.S. Capitol building in Washington Jan. 8, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters file/Jeenah Moon)



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How are liberal Catholics supposed to feel today? How are we supposed to think about an incoming administration that has promised to do so many things we find horrific? What spiritual and ethical norms should guide us as we contemplate having to cope with Donald Trump being president again?

Some people were surprised when Cardinal Robert McElroy, at the press conference announcing his appointment as Archbishop of Washington, said, "all of us as Americans should hope and pray that the government of our nation is successful in helping to enhance our society, our culture, our life and the whole of our nation." Successful? Enhance?

McElroy said something similar in a 2016 talk after Trump's first victory. "It is essential that in this moment, which has followed a deeply destructive political campaign, citizens and public leaders do not follow the example of many political opponents of President Obama who from his election onward worked toward the failure of his presidency," McElroy said. "Such an oppositional pathway is destructive, contrary to the American tradition and in contradiction to the Catholic teaching that calls citizens to support their national leaders in their efforts to advance the common good."

The cardinal is right. We are called to pray for the new president and the incoming administration and to support "their efforts to advance the common good." If Trump pursues policies that are contrary to the common good, we can and should oppose them. And we can expect a lot of his efforts to demand such opposition.

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Trump intends to renew his tax cuts which disproportionately favor the rich, as the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities explained. We do not know how Trump's "mass deportations" will play out, but we know that if they are indiscriminate, we

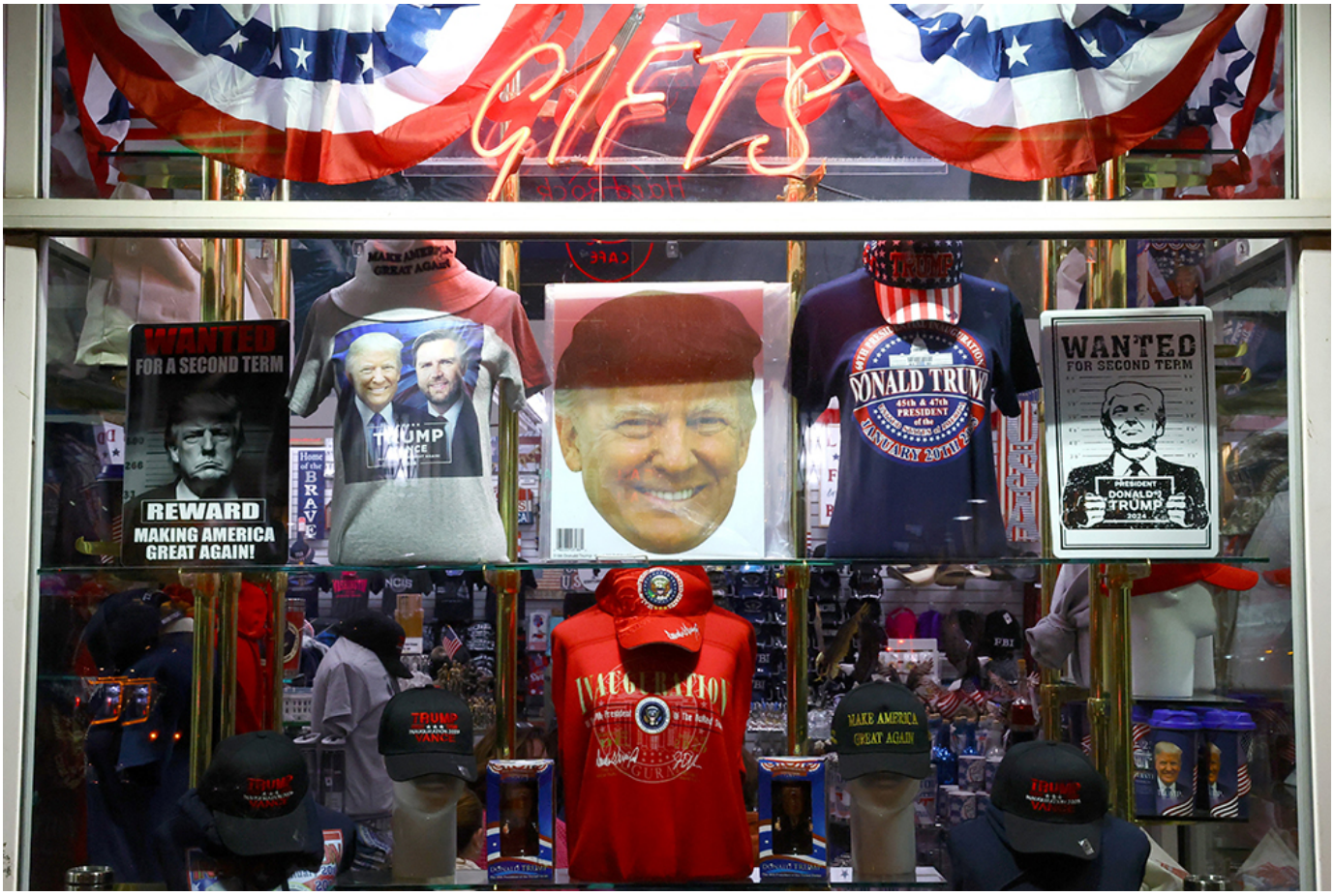
Catholics will need to oppose that. If Trump tries to curtail efforts to limit climate change and other forms of environmental damage, we Catholics will need to defend the teaching of our church, to say nothing of the patrimony owed to our children and grandchildren.

What then does it mean to hope for a successful four years?

First, we Catholics believe in divine providence. The Deists among the Founding Fathers, and the Unitarians too, believed in a God who created the world and set it going, but did not interfere one way or the other afterward. That is not the Christian God, certainly not the God we Catholics worship. Ours is an interfering God to whom we make prayers of intercession all the time.

We do not know what crises Trump will face in the next four years. George W. Bush entered office with the goal of lowering taxes, increasing gas and oil production, and fixing our broken immigration system. The terrorist attack on 9/11 changed all that. John F. Kennedy promised to close the missile gap if he won, yet he was called upon to confront the most dangerous atomic missile crisis any president had faced. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt moved into the White House, he knew his presidency would be profoundly driven by the need to confront the Depression, but he couldn't have foreseen the way it would also be defined by World War II. We can pray that Trump has the resolve of Bush, the patience of Kennedy and the will of Roosevelt, when some unforeseen crisis comes along.

Second, presidents sometimes surprise us. Few people had high expectations of Harry S. Truman when he became president on the death of Roosevelt. Truman was the only president in the 20th century who had not attended college. He got his political start in the corrupt Pendergast machine in Kansas City, Missouri. His selection to be FDR's running mate in 1944 was a compromise that enthused no one, least of all Truman himself.



A gift shop window displays products Jan. 4, 2025, commemorating the upcoming presidential inauguration for U.S. President-elect Donald Trump in Washington Jan. 20. (OSV News/Reuters/Fabrizio Bensch)

Yet, as we know, Truman went on to forge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), promote the economic reconstruction of Japan, and push the Marshall Plan through Congress. The American people had lost more than 400,000 soldiers killed in World War II, and they were not keen on sending their tax dollars to get Japan and Germany back on their feet, but Truman's foresight prevailed. His decision to fire Gen. Douglas MacArthur may well have saved the world from an atomic war as well as confirm civilian control over the military.

None of us, Catholics or otherwise, should be expected to forget what we know about Donald Trump. I confess I cringed when writing about Truman in a column about Trump because I discern no similarity between the two men. Still, we must hope — hope in divine providence and hope in human nature. We cannot predict the ways of providence, but we know Trump doesn't like bad poll numbers. If most

voters supported him because they wanted him back in charge of the economy, and he leads with deportation, they will register their disapproval and hopefully provoke a course correction. Our laws remain demanding due process, even for non-citizens. The chaos already emerging in Congress may well limit Trump's ability to enact laws that drag the country down. The filibuster, so often maligned, remains a bulwark to any radicalism from left or right.

I do not know what McElroy meant when he said we Catholics must hope the new administration succeeds, but I know what I will mean when I pray for that outcome. I will pray that the president rises to the emergencies we cannot foresee. I will pray that the president be changed, that he comes to abandon those policies that violate Catholic social teaching and embrace more morally upright policies. And, if these things do not happen, and Trump embarks upon policies that are patently immoral or unconstitutional, I shall pray that divine providence will visit confusion upon Trump and his team.