Opinion
Editorial



Stickers are lined up on a table for voters at the American Legion Post 53 polling location in Eau Claire, Wis., April 1, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Erica Dischino)

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As Catholic voters consider how to cast their ballots in November, the issues that have the greatest claim on our attention can be discerned from NCR's headlines since the 2024 election swept Donald Trump back into power: the cruel enforcement of immigration laws, the misguided war in Iran and the ongoing threats to democracy posed by the administration.

The Trump administration's draconian efforts to identify and deport undocumented immigrants continues to shock the conscience of all decent people. We do not object to arresting criminals, be they citizens or noncitizens. But targeting law-abiding immigrants, arresting them for a noncriminal violation of the nation's inadequate immigration laws, holding them in inhumane prisons and deporting them to hellish prisons abroad and sometimes to countries they have never lived in, all these constitute a tale of shame our nation will long regret.

This crackdown is especially unfair because our nation has, for several decades, enticed migrant workers to come to America, turning a blind eye to those corporations whose business plans require low-paid, unskilled labor. It is especially unjust because it denies migrants the right to have their cases heard in a court of law.

It is especially immoral because some migrants, such as those from Haiti, are being sent back to a failed state where criminal gangs control the streets. Temporary Protected Status was designed precisely for migrants from such horrific conditions in their home country. Terminating that status when conditions in the home country have not improved is cruel. The moral stain will be indelible.

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The United States has needed comprehensive immigration reform since the start of the present century. Twenty years ago, a compromise, which like all such compromises made neither side happy, passed the Senate but a different measure passed the House and the two chambers could not reach agreement. In 2013, the Senate again passed a comprehensive reform bill but the Republican leadership in the House refused to bring the bill to the floor for a vote.

These failures set the stage for the demagoguery we have witnessed since Trump first rode down the escalator of Trump Tower to announce his bid for the presidency

in 2015.

It goes without saying that ours is a nation of immigrants, and that anti-immigrant animus has long been part of American politics. Catholics in the 17th, 18th, 19th and early 20th century were especially targeted by nativist venom. Catholics from Latin America are targets today.

The bonds of baptism are as strong as the bonds of citizenship, or should be, and we commend the U.S. bishops for their outspoken advocacy for migrants. We commend the thousands of volunteers who accompany migrants to court hearings or who worked in now-shuttered welcoming centers along the border. In a dark time, the Catholic church has kept a measure of Christian hope and common decency alive. We have honored the memory of our immigrant forebears.

It is time now to elect a Congress that will rein in Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

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In the 250 years since our nation was founded, few foreign policy blunders rise to the level of stupidity and carelessness that has characterized Trump's war on Iran. Did the administration not foresee the closing of the Strait of Hormuz? Did they really think the Iranian people could throw off the oppressive rule of the mullahs and the Revolutionary Guard? Did they not expect Iran to respond to our bombing their military installations with bombing raids of their own on U.S. and allied installations throughout the Mideast? The only thing surprising about the war in Iran is the apparent lack of foresight shown by the Trump administration before starting it.

The Iran war does not meet the rigorous criteria of just war theory, the traditional means by which Catholics evaluate the moral significance of armed conflict. The recourse to war was not a last resort. The stated objectives were vague and changing, so no one can claim the damage inflicted by the war is necessarily less than the damage inflicted by the status quo. Perhaps most damning for an administration that prides itself on toughness, this war does not meet the requirement that it has a reasonable prospect of success.

Compared to other wars, the casualty rate in this war has been low. But the damage to U.S. foreign relations is incalculable. There is no conceivable way for this war to

end that does not diminish America's moral authority and strategic standing in the world.

It is time to elect a Congress that puts an end to this war that should have never been started.

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Lastly, we believe that voters should consider the various threats to democracy posed by the current administration. The recent banning of three major news outlets — CNN, MS NOW and Politico — from the White House is only the latest in a series of acts that contradict the Constitution. The effort to interfere with the states' conduct of elections is another such act. We tremble to think what the administration might yet do to challenge the will of the people in the midterm elections.

It is a curious fact that Catholic social doctrine never confers a blessing on democracy per se, as an end in itself. Instead, it is viewed as a means to other social goods. Pope Leo XIV, in his recent encyclical, detailed three of those goods: "The Church values democracy insofar as it guarantees the effective participation of citizens, enables them to elect and peacefully replace their leaders and prevents power from being monopolized by small elite groups motivated by particular or ideological interests." Trump's efforts to meddle with the electoral system threatens all three.

As Catholics and as citizens in this great experiment in ordered liberty, we can and should resist Trump's efforts to subvert democracy and the rule of law. Democracy is no guarantee of a good society. Trump won twice. Democracy is, as Winston Churchill famously said, "the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried."

It is time to elect a Congress that defends democracy.

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