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Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England, Oct. 2016 (Wikimedia Commons/DeFacto)



by Michael Sean Winters

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Watching President Donald Trump blame the Mueller investigation for the bad relations between the United States and Russia, instead of the man standing next to him, Vladimir Putin, who conducted the attempt to influence our election, I couldn't help but remember the time when Republicans made fun of Democrats who "blamed America first." Here is Ronald Reagan's U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick [addressing the 1984 GOP convention](#). At 16:35, she utters the famous phrase.

And listening to conservative columnist Charles Sykes examine the president's attempt to walk back his performance in Helsinki was priceless. Sykes [told Brian Williams](#) that Trump's comments made the excuse that the dog ate my homework look "brilliant." Touche.

On the other hand, Sean Hannity's bromance with the president was untouched by the debacle in Helsinki. At Politico, [Eliana Johnson tells the story](#), and it ain't pretty. Let's hope when Trump leaves the stage he takes his mouthpiece with him.

According to campaign finance reporting, 56 Republican incumbents were outraised by their Democratic challengers in the second quarter. To be sure, Republican super PACs might make up some of the financial difference, but the sluggish numbers in all these districts indicates a lack of enthusiasm in the GOP ranks. [Politico has the story](#).

Relatedly, Rep. Seth Moulton, whom Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi dismissed as "inconsequential" after he called for new Democratic leadership, formed a PAC that helps candidates who, like him, served in the military. Known as [Serve America PAC](#), Moulton's PAC is sitting on over half a million dollars at the end of the quarter, having raised over 1.3 million in the past two years. Inconsequential?

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Not sure how I missed this when it first came out, but Frontline had a great [documentary](#) on the problems plaguing the recovery effort in Puerto Rico, which included a serious portrayal of Wall Street firms as the fiscal equivalent of drug dealers, peddling easy money to desperate people. As well, the contrast between the U.S. government's efforts in Texas and Florida, where admittedly the storms hit first and were less severe, and its effort in Puerto Rico cannot but consider the fact

that Puerto Ricans are brown and can't vote for the presidency.

At The Washington Post, Elizabeth Bruenig hits another home run, this time [focusing on the ambivalence](#) with which we Americans view working class work and workers. Taking her cue from a new show at the National Portrait Gallery, she notes the loneliness in many of the paintings and the aspirations of "working people asking not for entry to another class but for dignity and respect in their lives as they are. ..." That is quite different from the acquisitiveness of the "American Dream," but it is also a far more common experience than the Horatio Alger rags-to-riches fable. Bruenig has become a "must read" in a very short time.

It isn't every day that I get to note my agreement with an article in First Things, let alone one penned by George Weigel. But I found myself applauding his [tribute to our mutual friend](#), Fr. Scott Newman, pastor of St. Mary's church in Greenville, South Carolina, on the occasion of Scott's 25th anniversary as a priest. Scott and I were in seminary together many, many years ago, and we have stayed in touch through the years. His ecclesiology is not my ecclesiology, and our political leanings are even further apart. But he is a smart, funny and faithful and whenever he calls, I pour myself a drink and sit down for a delightful conversation. *Ad multos annos!*

On a lighter side: CNN [profiled Blenheim Palace](#), the building in the United Kingdom where Prime Minister Theresa May threw a dinner for Trump. I only noticed two mistakes. First, a photograph is captioned "State Dining Room," but the room in the picture is the saloon, the centrally located room just off the ceremonial hall, the two rooms constituting the central core of a British mansion of this period. Second, the architect, John Vanbrugh, would not have been entirely surprised when he won the commission to design Blenheim Palace. He had already designed Castle Howard, known to people of our generation as the fictional home of the Flytes in the miniseries adaptation of "Brideshead Revisited." Nonetheless, I applaud the mainstream media when they take the time to explain the sometimes monumental backdrops to events of the day, especially when one of the gems of the brief English baroque period is in the spotlight.

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

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