Opinion
Editorial

The Milwaukee city skyline is seen on April 7. Republicans will hold their national convention in Milwaukee in 2024. (AP/Morry Gash, File)

by NCR Editorial Staff

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The Republican convention in Milwaukee is more than a year away, but already the list of contenders for the GOP nomination for the 2024 presidential election is filling out. There's the indicted former president, the xenophobic Floridian, two South Carolinians and, for good measure, a right-wing Catholic podcaster who doesn't believe Francis is the real pope.

At the National Catholic Reporter, we will be following, reporting on and sharing opinion pieces about this primary race, as well as the general election. But we acknowledge that a majority of our readers are unlikely to be GOP voters. Still, we'd like to address those who are, and any Republican U.S. Catholics out there.

Please, urge your party to do better.

We recognize that some of you lean Republican because of a fiscal conservatism and belief in small government, and more than a few of you ended up in the Grand Old Party because of a commitment to pro-life values. Reasonable people can disagree about how extensive government's social safety net should be, or how to best protect life from womb to tomb.

But it's time to admit that today's Republican Party is a failed one, one whose leading members refuse to accept the basic premises of democracy and no longer seem committed to the American project.

This is most obvious with former President Donald Trump, who continues to push the "big lie" about the 2020 election results and whose involvement in the Jan. 6, 2021, uprising may still result in legal repercussions. Can Catholics really justify voting for a candidate who may be charged with overthrowing the core principle of democracy? This is not to mention his other legal troubles, including being found liable in New York for sexually abusing and defaming a woman — which is also clearly not consistent with Catholic or pro-life values.*

And if voters thought Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis might represent their views on social or economic issues without the drama of Trump, think again. His recent statement that he would consider pardoning Trump and other Jan. 6 defendants puts him in the less-than-full-support-for-democracy camp.

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DeSantis' crusades against the Walt Disney Company, public schools and university faculty also go beyond the typical strategy of culture war pandering to the base. There is a meanness to his attacks on the disenfranchised. Remember, this is the guy who sent weary asylum-seekers to Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, as a political stunt.

Moderate Republicans may be intrigued by Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, who is being billed by some as the "alternative to Trumpism." Rather than stoking the politics of fear, Scott is focusing on hope and optimism, seemingly taking a page from the Reagan and Obama playbooks.

But Catholics should ask hard economic questions about Scott and other GOP candidates whose commitment to neoliberal economic policies trumps church teaching about the preferential option for the poor. Scott is well-connected to the donor class (including the Koch brothers), coming into the campaign with more cash on hand than any other presidential candidate in U.S. history. Such connections come at a price.

In 2016, roughly half of U.S. Catholic voters, especially white Catholics, backed Trump. Four years later, support for Trump declined, dipping below 50%, but was still relatively strong, especially in swing states and even bumping up a bit among Black and Latino voters in some areas. Current signs point to Trump or a similarly anti-small-d-democratic candidate on the ballot for 2020.

Now that *Roe* v. *Wade* has been overturned, voters inspired by their opposition to legalized abortion can take their activism to the states, where the decisions are being made about rights, limits and access. On the national level, at least, we urge caution.

Some Democrats may be secretly hoping for a Trump nomination, with the assumption that he would be easier to beat. But that is a dangerous gamble. Instead, we ask, sincerely, that Catholic Republicans think hard about the future of their party — and the country.

* *This sentence has been updated to accurately describe the legal proceedings.*

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