

Obamacare surcharges, America's shrinking army, and what is Kirsten Gillibrand thinking? – US national blog round up for 22 – 28 February

USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson, looks at the best in political blogging from the Beltway. Our round-up of state blogs will follow on Saturday afternoon.

The Democratic Party, the GOP and elections

On Wednesday, *PolitucusUSA* [reports](#) on a recent poll that has found that 82 percent of Democrats want Hillary Clinton to run for President in 2016. They say that if Clinton's momentum continues, then by 2016 she will be the most visibly 'in demand' presidential candidate since Eisenhower in 1952. Also looking at Hillary Clinton, *Daily Kos* writes that her potential presidency could [redefine progressive governance](#), as she is not likely to be seen as being on the left of the party, as President Obama currently is. *PolitucusUSA* [writes](#) that it is good to be a Democrat thinking about 2016 at the moment, given that it is very likely that the next presidential primary cycle for the party is likely to be much easier than for the Republicans.

Moving back to the current President, on Monday, *The Monkey Cage* looks at what his [place in history](#) might be. They say that while he is not one of the best or worst presidents, rather, on balance he can be considered to be 'average'. On Thursday, *The Lonely Conservative* is [critical](#) of President Obama, who they say is set to veto the 'Stop IRS Targeting of Political Beliefs Act', which means that he supports the targeting of conservative groups by the Internal Revenue Services.

Meanwhile, *The Political Carnival* [looks](#) at recent comments from Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand who is a strong advocate for women's rights, and against cuts to food stamps. They are puzzled after her comments supporting adding more sanctions against Iran, and wonder 'what is she thinking?'

The Atlantic [covers](#) what appears to be a trend of black Democratic mayors working closely with Republican Governors. Citing examples such as former Newark Mayor Senator Cory Booker and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, and Atlanta Mayor, Kasim Reed and Georgia Governor Nathan Deal, they say that these close relationships are likely to stem from short and long term electoral benefits for Governors, and economic and political benefits for Mayors.



Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand meets members of the 106th Rescue Wing, Westhampton Beach, NY. By Senior Airman Christopher Muncy [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

On Tuesday, *Daily Kos* takes a close [look](#) at the latest Republican legislative craze across the States – allowing businesses to refuse to serve gay customers for religious reasons. They say that while the initiatives in as many as ten states may not be successful, they are backed by far-right think tanks and advocacy groups, who are not likely to go down without a fight. On another policy issue that Republicans have been trying to fight, Texas

Governor Rick Perry, [said](#) this week that he did not think that it was the government's business to set the minimum wage.

Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that the GOP establishment's 'war' on the Tea Party appears to be working, after polling suggests that primary challenges in Senate races in Texas, Kansas and Kentucky appear to be losing their strength. On Wednesday, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) on some bad news in general for Republicans – support for repealing the Obama administration's signature healthcare reform, the Affordable Care Act, has hit an all-time low of 31 percent.

Looking ahead to the GOP's chances in the 2016 Presidential election, *Daily Kos* says that a [new poll](#) shows that Republicans no longer want New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie, to run. This is likely as a result of controversy over his 'Bridgegate' scandal from earlier this year. Christie's lack of popularity does not seem to have reached Mitt Romney, the Republican's Presidential candidate in 2012, who has announced this week that he will [fundraise alongside Christie in Boston](#), according to *Crooks & Liars*. Now that Christie's 2016 chances have been pushed aside by much of the GOP establishment, attention has turned to Wisconsin Governor, Scott Walker. *National Journal* [writes](#) on Tuesday that while he is being hyped as a potential presidential candidate, he still must win re-election to his current office this November. *Daily Kos* surveys the Republican's 'bench' of potential 2016 candidates, and pronounces it 'awful', at least in comparison to the Democrats'.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Sunday *The Feed* looks at the diverging priorities of the American public and Congress. They [say](#) that new polling show that issues such as immigration reform and gun policy are of low priority for people, even though they have been the subject of intense Congressional debates in recent years.

On Monday *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that Democratic Representative John Dingell had announced his retirement from the House. At the age of 87, Dingell has been in the House since 1955, and has the longest tenure of any current member of Congress. They also report that his wife is expected to run for his seat. *The Atlantic* says that Dingell (who was on the floor of the House as a page on December 8th, 1941 as Franklin Roosevelt made his famous Pearl Harbour speech), [represents](#) a kind of New Deal style social politics, combined with respect for business and an attachment to conservative social values, that no longer seems to exist.

This week also saw a meeting of Democratic and Republican Governors at the White House this week, but the apparent general good feeling was shattered by Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal's criticism of President Obama for not approving the Keystone XL pipeline, [writes](#) *Crooks & Liars*.

On Tuesday, *Hit & Run* [says](#) that Republicans are upset that the Obama administration has proposed spending limits for the Department of Defense in 2015. They say that it is odd to hear that Republicans are so opposed to these spending cuts, when they promote fiscal responsibility in all other government spending. Meanwhile *The American Prospect* says that people should stop worrying about the Army becoming the 'smallest since World War II', as has been widely reported. They [say](#) that the number of troops in an army has only a very bare relationship with actual military power. Still on armed-forces related issues, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that Senate Republicans are threatening to filibuster a bill which would set entitlements for veterans. They are concerned about the cost of paying for these benefits. Later in the week, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the GOP was able to successfully filibuster the bill with just 41 votes.

Looking ahead to other Congressional priorities, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) that Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has stated that the GOP will do nothing more to advance tax reform; *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that the latest GOP bill to change the Affordable Care Act would actually take away health insurance coverage from more than one million workers; and *Daily Kos* [says](#) that Republicans are still dragging their feet on extending emergency unemployment aid, making unreasonable demands in exchange for votes.

On Tuesday, *Roll Call's Beltway Insiders* takes a look at the [Congressional budget process](#) in all its convoluted glory. They conclude that the budget process would be absolutely impossible to understand for an outsider. Convoluted or not, Congressional budget fights have been a mainstay in American politics in recent years. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) on what may be a silver lining to the infighting that led to a government shutdown last year – that

the 'budget wars' have actually led to the deficit being reduced by \$3.3 trillion over the next decade.

On Thursday, new Chair of the Federal Reserve, Janet Yellen addressed the Senate Banking Committee. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that some of her comments on 'softer' spending show that the 'drumbeat' of new disappointing economic data, such as flat job growth, is becoming difficult to ignore.

Affordable Care

Recent weeks have seen reports and speculation that the Affordable Care Act ('Obamacare') will have detrimental effects on jobs and growth. On Monday, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) on a recent poll of economists on what the likely impacts of Obamacare would be on the economy. Their answer? They don't know. *The Foundry* believes that Obamacare is very likely to have negative economic consequences, [reporting](#) this week that a majority of small businesses will see their health insurance premiums on the increase as a result. Perhaps some small businesses will even add an 'Obamacare

[surcharge](#)' to their prices?

The Atlantic [looks](#) at Arkansas, which had rejected federal funds to expand Medicaid, but had instead decided to use the money to allow new Medicaid beneficiaries to buy private plans. They say that now the state legislature is blocking the reauthorization of funds for this so-called 'private option', and even if the reauthorization is passed, the state would be forbidden from promoting this option.

The American Prospect [covers](#) Obamacare's role in covering mental health treatment – the first time insurers have been required to cover this. They say that the dearth of psychiatrists to treat mental health issues (and their concentration in urban areas), may undermine the goal of bringing mental-health care to low-income patients.

While most of the problems that previously plagued the Obamacare website, Healthcare.gov are now gone, this week the costs of the cloud computing contract for the federal Obamacare exchange came to light. [According](#) to *Hit & Run* these were \$46 million by October last year, up from a predicted \$11 million in 2011. Despite these issues, enrollment in Obamacare remains high. On Tuesday, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that it has surged ahead to 4 million, putting the Obama administration on course to reach its target of 7 million enrollees.

Foreign policy and defense

On Saturday, the *White House Dossier* [assesses](#) whether or not President Obama has had any foreign policy successes, and finds him almost completely wanting. Perhaps this lack of foreign policy success is the reason that the majority of Americans now believe that world leaders do not respect Obama, as reported by *The Lonely*



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Conservative who [discuss](#) a new Gallup poll.

The Foundry takes a [close look](#) at Obama's military strategy, ahead of the Quadrennial Defense Review. They say that America's status as a global superpower is at risk as the Pentagon is likely to begin suffering under a 'path to austerity'.

On Thursday, *The Feed* [looks](#) at why the U.S. takes its pro-Israel stance. Their answer is that Americans, in general, sympathise with Israel, meaning that any concern over the 'Israel lobby' should be 'put to bed'.

The economy and society

On Saturday, *Informed Comment* [writes](#) on a recent ruling from a federal judge that spying by the New York Police Department on Muslims, with no evidence of wrongdoing was legal. This ruling has caused a sharp outcry from civil rights groups, who say that it is a troubling and dangerous decision.

Much of the debate over potentially increasing the level of the minimum wage has been over the negative effects on businesses that might be forced to raise prices as a result. *Crooks & Liars* [covers](#) a new report which finds that an increase in the minimum wage to \$10.10 would mean a one cent increase in the price of a \$16 product.

On Sunday *The Foundry* [says](#) that recent moves to redefine marriage to include same-sex couples have created a 'climate of intolerance and intimidation' for those citizens who do not agree with that definition of marriage. They also write that laws that add sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of 'protected classes' where discrimination is not allowed, fail to protect citizens' religious liberty.

Caffeinated Politics is [pleased](#) that several state Governors are unhappy at the idea of making marijuana legal, including John Hickenlooper, Governor of Colorado, who has told Governors not to follow his state's example of legalising the drug until more is known about the consequences.

On Thursday, *Hit & Run* [looks](#) at the surprisingly high number of States (19) that allow teachers to practice corporal punishment, after a state legislator in Kansas introduced a bill allowing teachers and school personnel to spank or strike children to the point of 'redness or bruising'.

And finally...

February is Black History month. To celebrate, *Daily Kos* has a [list of books you should read](#), including *Black Skin White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon.

Crooks & Liars [looks](#) at an amusing reaction of a pizzeria in Tucson, Arizona, to the state's anti-gay bill signed into law this week (but later vetoed): reserving the right to serve Arizona legislators.

[The Capitol Hill fox is back](#), reports *Roll Call's Heard on the Hill*. This time he may have a friend – a possum was also sighted nearby this week.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USApp– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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