

Democrats up all night on climate change, the GOP's foreign policy problem, and is Mitt Romney considering another presidential run? – US national blog round up for 8 – 14 March

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

For most political commentators and pundits, Hillary Clinton is very likely to be the Democratic nominee in the 2016 presidential race, and her potential primary and general election runs are already generating a great deal of commentary. On Saturday, *Caffeinated Politics* says that the Democrats' 'dream ticket' for 2016 is actually Independent Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Senator Elizabeth Warren, and that if Sanders runs against Clinton, we may well see 'one of the most amazing presidential primaries in the last hundred years'. Still on Clinton, *National Journal* wonders if will be able to get the support of [working-class white men](#) back for the party, given Obama's loss of support from that group. On Wednesday, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that Democrats need to forge about Hillary Clinton and 2016 for now, and focus their energies on the 2014 mid-term elections. Some of that energy should be coming from Former President [Bill Clinton](#), writes *National Journal*, who say that Clinton's high approval rating means that his endorsements of Democratic candidates in the mid-terms may make voters a net ten percent more likely to vote for them.

Moving to the current President, on Tuesday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that the Obama administration is not centrist – as many currently believe – but has actually helped to lead the way in Democrats' recent moves to the left. Left or right aside, Obama found himself [Between Two Ferns](#) this week, comedian Zack Galifianakis mock interview show. *PoliticusUSA* writes that whilst on the show, Obama showed his comedic timing and used Galifianakis' questions to highlight the absurdity of some of the GOP's points against him whilst in office.

On Monday, *The Monkey Cage* looks at the Democrats' popularity among [young people](#) – whom they may no longer be able to count on for support. They find that the youngest millenials, who came of age during Obama's presidency, would have been more likely to have voted for Republican Mitt Romney in 2012 than Obama. That said, *Roll Call's Rothenblog* reports that according to recent polls, the Democrats' political brand is still rated [more highly](#) than that of Republicans.

Democrats' popularity was also brought into relief this week, with the narrow loss by Democratic candidate Alex Sink in the special election for Florida's 13th Congressional District. On Wednesday, *Crooks & Liars* [wonders](#) if Democrats had any reason to vote on Tuesday, given that if just over 3,000 more had turned out to vote, they would have won. They say the Republicans' ability to get their own base to turn out (and the Democrats' lack of action in this area), was a large influence on the outcome. Meanwhile, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that, despite what the media and the GOP have been saying, Obamacare was not the reason that Sink lost the election; voter outreach was.

On Sunday, *FreakOutNaton* [reports](#) that former 2012 presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, has been gathering debate advisers and senior campaign aides to in his Utah retreat. They say that it may just be a reunion – or it may be a brainstorming session for another presidential run in 2016. On Tuesday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that after David Jolly's victory in Florida's special election, a Republican wave in this year's mid-term elections is now looking more likely.



Rand Paul at CPAC Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

Last week saw Republicans gather for the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), featuring speeches from GOP leaders and movers and shakers. On Saturday, *The Atlantic* says that many Republicans, such as Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, and Chris Christie, used the conference as an audition for the 2016 presidential election. They [say](#) that while the conference draws right-wingers of all stripes, it is increasingly dominated by libertarians. *Wonkblog* has [everything](#) you need to know about what happened at CPAC, including the most important moment that no-one noticed. On Monday, reflecting on CPAC, *National Journal* [wonders](#) where the party gatherings for moderates of the centre-right and left have gone. Senator Rand Paul has a good week at CPAC, winning a straw poll on Saturday for the second year in a row, [writes](#) *National Journal*.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell generated some publicity at CPAC last week, by waving a rifle around, though *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Tuesday that he has not even admitted to actually owning a gun. Meanwhile, *Red State* discusses McConnell's recent comments that he wanted to 'crush' conservatives everywhere, referring to Tea Party candidates. They [say](#) that McConnell has been fairly open in the past about his contempt for the far-right part of the GOP, and that his comments are attacking the conservatives who have saved the Republican Party from itself. Meanwhile, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that McConnell is looking in trouble from both sides for his Kentucky Senate seat with a Tea Party primary challenger 'breathing down his neck' from the right, and Democrat Alison Grimes pushing him from the 'sane middle'.

On Sunday, *Roll Call's Hawkings Here* [writes](#) on the difficulties of GOP Chairman of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, Darrel Issa of California. Last week Issa got into trouble over for cutting off the microphone of colleague Elijah Cummings in a hearing, and then walking out, much to the disdain of Democrats, and even some Republicans.

In light of the recent crisis in Ukraine, *The Atlantic* discusses The GOP's [foreign policy problem](#) – that compared to current Democratic leaders, most potential Republican presidential candidates for 2016 have little experience in the area. Despite the GOP's lack of foreign policy experience, that has not stopped them for criticising President Obama for not taking a tougher stand against Russian President Putin's actions in the Ukraine, [according](#) to *PoliticusUSA*, who accuse them of hypocrisy over their own President's invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Moving back to Senator Rand Paul, *The Lonely Conservative* [says](#) that he is now taking a stronger stance on foreign policy than he has otherwise been known for, calling for more strength to be shown against Putin.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Sunday, *Daily Kos* [examines](#) the demographic underpinnings of parts of the U.S.'s shifts to the left and right. They say that much of the reason why Democrats have gained in some parts of the country, like Virginia for example, is due to changes in race and education in those areas. Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at how Congress recognizes state governments under the Constitution, in light of a Colorado lawsuit that accuses the state's government of not being 'republican' in form for having adopted the Taxpayer Bill of Rights in 1992, which does not allow new taxes without a vote of the people. In light of accusations that President Obama has been exercising too much executive power, on Monday, *Roll Call* looks at Congress' current legislative tools, [arguing](#) that they are

enough for the body to defend itself without new measures being put into place.

On Monday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that 26 Senate Democrats (and two Independents) were planning an all-nighter in the Senate to talk about climate change. *United Liberty* is cynical about the 'talkathon', [arguing](#) that it is more about cronyism with Democratic donors than real concern about the environment. *Roll Call's At the Races* [says](#) that moderate Democrats are largely missing from the roster of speakers – especially those who are up for reelection later this year. On Wednesday, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at a recent survey of voters which asked them what makes them more or less likely to vote for a candidate. Very high on their lists are two contradictory points; they support candidates that will cut federal spending, and those that are committed to bringing in federal dollars and projects to their local area.

This week saw Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Chairwoman of the Senate's Intelligence Committee, accuse the CIA of spying on Congress. On Tuesday, *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that while Feinstein is generally a defender of the surveillance state, this may be one way for her to support the Fourth Amendment. *National Journal* [reports](#) that the CIA's Director John Brennan has denied Feinstein's accusations in what they call a 'tap dance' around the truth. On Wednesday, *United Liberty* [accuses](#) Feinstein of hypocrisy, as she has in the past been an apologist for the National Security Agency's domestic surveillance programs.

Foreign policy and defense

The crisis in Ukraine continued to loom large in the media this week. On Monday, *The Foundry* [writes](#) that the U.S cannot allow the Ukraine to be destroyed, and should stand up to Russia by showing its commitment to NATO allies and deploying assets in the region. On Monday, *The Feed* [comments](#) on the strategy, supported by many, that the U.S. should undermine Russia's influence in Ukraine and Eastern Europe by further exploiting, and exporting, its shale gas resources. They say that this is not a realistic strategy, as the U.S. lacks facilities to transport large quantities of natural gas across the Atlantic, and there are higher profits to be had in Asia, compared to Europe, in any case. Many have been critical of Vice President Joe Biden's lack of foreign policy expertise, including former Defense Secretary Bob Gates. On Thursday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that Biden has been the Obama administration's prime contact with Ukraine, and urged former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to pull back riot police and negotiate with protestors. On Wednesday, *Hit & Run* [points out](#) that while the U.S. and Russia are fighting over Ukraine, they continue to cooperate in space, with Russia transporting astronauts to the International Space Station, after the retirement of the Space Shuttle.

Affordable Care

On Monday, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [reports](#) on the decision last week on the decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C Circuit which rejected challenges made by the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons (AAPS) against the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare). The AAPS had challenged Obamacare because it contained revenue raising measures, yet the substance of the bill came from the Senate, not the House of Representatives. Last year, Republican Senator Ted Cruz led the charge to defund Obamacare, but met with no success. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Monday that House Republicans were set to vote three times this week to fix Obamacare – not to repeal it, and that no-one should tell Cruz. They say that this shows that the GOP has essentially given up in their efforts to repeal the law.

March 31st is the deadline for people to enrol in health plans under Obamacare. *Wonkblog* [reports](#) on Tuesday that some states that run their own health exchanges are pushing for an extension to this enrollment period as they have been struggling with signing people up for coverage. Meanwhile, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) on a former Lockheed Martin employee who signed up for coverage under Obamacare in New York, but after gaining treatment, was later told that his hospital would only be honouring insurance from another provider. He is now facing bills of nearly \$1,800.

Tuesday saw the latest report on Obamacare's enrollment figures – 4.2 million have signed up thus far according to the administration. *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that this is far below the original target of 7 million signups by the end of March, and that the 'real' number of paid enrollments is even lower.

The economy and society

On Saturday, *The Foundry* [reflects](#) on a speech made by President Obama last week to minority youths; they say that he only mentioned the word 'marriage' once, and that he should not be afraid to talk about the importance of marriage. Still on marriage, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on a new poll that finds that 61 percent of Republicans under 30 support same-sex marriage, and argue that the party is now out of step on this issue with its young voters.

The Keystone XL pipeline, which would transport Canadian tar sands to U.S Gulf Coast refineries, has been a controversial in recent years, and has been stalled due to

environmental concerns. *The Feed* [writes](#) on Monday that 65 percent of Americans polled now support the pipeline, up by 6 percent since 2012. They say that the potential economic benefits for the pipeline now seem to trump any environmental concerns. On Sunday, *Newsmax* [reports](#) on its coming TV channel, Newsmax TV, which aims to broaden the political conversation beyond labels like 'liberal' and 'conservative'. They say that timing is now good for a new network given the often 'polarizing' take of Fox News. Meanwhile, *The Left Coaster* [wonders](#) where the 'progressive' news channels are.

And finally...

Hit & Run [reports](#) that Amtrak is offering free rides to writers who are willing to write on, and about, its trains.

On Monday, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) that last year taxpayers lost \$105 million worth of pennies and nickels, as the costs of the metals used to produce them rose.

Outside the Beltway [previews](#) the next President's new limousine.

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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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Rally in support of the Affordable Care Act in front of the US Supreme Court in Washington DC. Credit:



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