

## End of the ‘Russia reset’, how business got behind gay rights, and is it time to enlarge the House? – US national blog round up for 1 – 7 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.*

### Foreign policy and defense

The biggest news in the U.S., and indeed anywhere, this week was Russia's military intervention into the Crimea region of the Ukraine, following the ousting of that country's President, Viktor Yanukovich. Following President Obama's speech last week where he stated that Russia would 'face costs' for its intervention, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) on Saturday that Republican Senator John McCain wants the U.S to go to war over the crisis, and is trying to make the President look like a weak leader. Meanwhile, *The Lonely Conservative* [writes](#) that the Obama administration's much vaunted 'Reset' with Russia, put in place by the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, is no longer 'going so well', leaving Russia to essentially do whatever it wants. On the same issue, *The Monkey Cage* [writes](#) on Sunday that the 'Russia reset' was already dead before the current crisis, and that Obama must now focus on isolating Russia.

One politician who seems to be confused about Obama's line on the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, is Senator Lindsey Graham. *FreakOutNation* [reports](#) that he has criticised Obama for threatening Putin as he appears 'weak and indecisive', but then states that 'Obama needs to do something'. On Monday *PoliticusUSA* takes Republicans to task for their past support for Vladimir Putin, especially after his op-ed on Syria in the New York Times last year. They [wonder](#) if Republicans will now express contrition for their previous praise for Putin for his anti-Obama and anti-gay stances.

On Monday, *Hit & Run* [responds](#) to an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* that the U.S. should deploy its Sixth Fleet into the Black Sea. They say that the U.S. can 'wag its fingers' on the crisis, and perhaps impose sanctions, but given Russia's leverage in Ukraine, the U.S. faces very real limits on the credibility of its demands and threats. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Tuesday on recent polls that show that after wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, there is very little appetite in the U.S. for involvement in a new conflict in an area that they feel that America has no responsibility to defend. *Informed Comment* [uses](#) the crisis to look at America's role in the world as an imperial power. They argue that the power that is 'seeping' out of the U.S. system does not appear to be flowing elsewhere, and also that major wars between powers have largely ceased to exist. On Thursday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the U.S. had imposed sanctions and visa restrictions on individuals and groups responsible for undermining democracy in Ukraine.



President Barack Obama talks on the phone in the Oval Office with Russian President Vladimir Putin about the situation in Ukraine, March 1, 2014.  
(Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

On a non-Ukraine related issue, *The Feed* [looks](#) at the threat posed by the 'populist surge' in Europe, and the

problems that they may bring to the current EU-U.S. trade talks.

## **The Democratic Party, the GOP and elections**

While most commentators are now convinced that Hillary Clinton will be the Democratic candidate in the 2016 Presidential election, there is still some speculation about what current Vice-President Joe Biden's intentions are. On Monday, *The Atlantic* [wonders](#) what Biden is up to, given some of his recent comments and attempts to cast off the 'control' of the Obama administration.

This week the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) released its list of its top races ahead of this year's mid-term elections. *National Journal* [says](#) that the 16 seat 'Red to Blue' list shows how hard it will be for the party to gain a majority in the House of Representatives. Also responding to the list, *The Lonely Conservative* writes that the DCCC is setting a [low bar](#) given that even if they win back those 16 seats, they still need to win one more to win back the House. *The Atlantic* [weighs in](#) on Wednesday, saying that given the GOP seems more likely to gain seats than lose them, and with their Senate majority looking increasingly tenuous; Congressional Democrats may be 'doomed'.

Things aren't [looking](#) so great for President Obama this week, either. *The Lonely Conservative* writes that new polling shows that his approval rating has sunk to a mere 38 percent.

Moving to the Republican Party in the news this week, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Sunday that the GOP has a 'transparent' agenda of class warfare, as illustrated by their opposition to job bills, and that their agenda is to keep people desperate for work, with more seeking jobs than can find them, which will in turn drive down wages.

On Thursday, *The Atlantic* [previews](#) the battle for the House Speakership, once the current holder of the job, John Boehner retires. They say that a recent squabble between Representative Jeb Hensarling and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor may offer an early window into the likely jockeying for the speakership whenever Boehner decides to retire. Turning to Boehner himself, *The Lonely Conservative* reports that he has been [snubbed](#) by this year's Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), the GOP's annual gathering, and has not been invited to speak. This has not been a good week for the speaker – *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that he is being 'bullied' by the Tea Party wing of the GOP, while he demands that President Obama takes a stronger stand against Russia and President Putin. Later in the week, they also [report](#) that Putin has managed to do the impossible – rallied Republicans to work *with* the President on imposing sanction against Russia.

Unfortunately this agreement does not reach into areas of economic policy. On Monday, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) that Republican Representative, Paul Ryan has proposed a far different vision to promote economic mobility and changes to entitlements than Obama's proposed budget this week. On Wednesday *The Left Coaster* [says](#) that the House GOP should be held in contempt, after Darrel Issa (R-CA), who whilst chairing the Oversight and Government Reform Committee in the purported IRS Tea Party targeting scandal, ended the hearing and prevented ranking member Elijah Cummings (D-MD) from making his own statement and asking questions of his own to the witness. Moving to the Senate, on Thursday, *National Journal* [looks](#) at the relationship between Senators Marco Rubio and Rand Paul, saying that Paul's isolationist foreign policy streak may come up against Rubio's more hawkish tendencies in the lead up to the 2016 GOP presidential candidate nomination race. *Daily Kos*, [reporting](#) from the CPAC this week, says that a picture of an empty room at a session on minority outreach illustrates the GOP's problem with non-white voters.

## **Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda**

This week saw President Obama send a budget to Congress, and with total spending levels agreed upon last year and the debt limit extended, some might consider it to be 'boring'. *Roll Call's Hawkings Here* gives [five reasons](#) why this budget year is likely to be anything but boring. Reason #1? House Republicans are pushing for the budget to balance in the next decade, and it may not pass on the floor. *Wonkblog* takes the opposite line, with [five reasons why Obama's budget matters even less](#) this year – one of them being that no-one is paying a great deal of attention to budget issues at the moment.

On Sunday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that House Speaker John Boehner is 'playing' Washington; having discussions and making noise about important issues, such as immigration, but with little likelihood of a vote occurring. *Crooks*

& *Liars* echoes this, writing that, despite unveiling a set of principles for immigration reform in January, the House GOP is still unlikely to pass it. They [say](#) that it could have dire results for the party, as it may alienate the country's fastest growing voting bloc. Meanwhile, on Monday, *Occasional Planet*, looking at a new tax bill from Representative Dave Camp (R-MI), which would cut corporate income tax and reduce individual tax brackets, [say](#) that given the bill may also mean cuts to entitlements, they prefer it when Congress is gridlocked. On Wednesday, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that new research shows that 2 million people have had their unemployment benefits cut since Republicans let their emergency unemployment aid expire late last year – aid that the GOP is refusing to renew.

Moving to what the GOP has been doing in Congress; *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that they were gearing up this week for their 50<sup>th</sup> vote to dismantle Obamacare – this time the vote is on a bill to delay the individual mandate and eliminate the penalty for not buying insurance. *PoliticusUSA* thinks that this is the GOP's 51<sup>st</sup> attempt at killing Obamacare, but also [reports](#) that President Obama has promised to veto the legislation in the event that it ever reaches him. Moving to the Senate, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Thursday that Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand has been

lobbying to get enough votes to pass a bill which would put decisions about sexual assaults in the military in the hands of public prosecutors. They say that the bill is a rare case where some Democrats are opposed, and may still fail even with 10 Republican votes. Hollywood celebrity Seth Rogen was at the Capitol this week, speaking to a Senate committee on Alzheimers. [According](#) to *Roll Call's Heard on the Hill* Rogen blasted the committee for lack of attendance at the session.

On Monday, *The Foundry* [writes](#) that the real problem in Congress is that the body has willingly given up much of its law-making ability, with lobbyists and administrative agencies often developing policy. *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at a similarly downbeat view of Congress, saying that many Representatives are leaving after only one term, seeking positions in local government. Meanwhile *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [advocates](#) increasing the size of the House. They argue with each representative answering to an average of 700,000 constituents, having more members would make gerrymandering more difficult and improve rural representation.

## Affordable Care

On Sunday, *The Feed* [writes](#) that many Democratic Governors who are up for reelection this November are concerned about the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare). They say that with many negative stories around the President's signature policy, such as increasing premiums, the Governors are worried that the program is dragging them down. They later [write](#) that even if Governors are unsure about Obamacare, the American people still trust the Democrats on healthcare more than they do the GOP. *Daily Kos* writes on Monday that, despite their opposition, House Republicans still do not have a viable alternative to Obamacare. What they do have, is a [PR campaign](#).

As the week continues, *White House Dossier* reports that the Obama administration is to again delay the requirement that insurers offer plans that are compliant with the new law for a further two years. They [say](#) this tactic which will allow people to keep their plans will avoid people receiving their cancellation notices around the time of the mid-term elections.

## The economy and society

The Common Core State Standards Initiative for schools has drawn criticism in recent years, as it sets up national-level standards, and removes local decision making. *The Foundry* [says](#) that recent remarks from Democrats that a name change for the program might help to correct Common Core's 'image problem' won't help



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as many parents and teachers are against national standards no matter how they are named.

This week *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that the National Rifle Association opposes the appointment of Dr Vivek Murphy as the next Surgeon General because of his statements that guns are a major health concern in America. Also on the issue of gun ownership, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) on Thursday that cities are losing the power to regulate guns, in favour of legislation passed at state level.

Following the vetoing of a bill to allow discrimination against gay people based on religious freedom last week in Arizona, there was a great deal of commentary on gay rights this week. On Sunday, *The Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at how big business got behind gay rights – mostly via lobbying from gay rights groups in the 1990s and 2000s. On Sunday, *The Political Carnival* [writes](#) that the LGBT community ‘scares’ the GOP who are worried about what they call the ‘homosexual agenda’. *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at a survey of attitudes towards same-sex marriage, finding that only 41 percent of Americans oppose it – meaning that opponents are now on the wrong side of public opinion. *The Atlantic* looks at the wide implications of religious freedom laws similar to the one that was vetoed last week, [writing](#) that these sorts of laws could end up hurting the faithful, if they are used against members of their own communities.

On Sunday, *The Foundry* [looks](#) at the problem of jail sentences often also being life sentences for poverty. They say one possible solution is to encourage correctional educational programs for those who are incarcerated, which would help to lower recidivism and increase employment odds among inmates after they are released. *The Atlantic* also [looks](#) at poverty and inequality this week, writing that new research has found that greater redistribution within society may not have negative effects on economic growth. On Wednesday *Hit & Run* takes an opposite line, [writing](#) that, in light of Obama’s budget this week, a sluggish economy calls for less federal spending, not more.

On Thursday, *Bloomberg Businessweek* [covers](#) Chris Ruddy, CEO of Newsmax’s plans to launch NewsmaxTV this June, which will be a more information based and less polarizing competitor for Fox News.

### And finally...

*FreakOutNation* [reports](#) this week that a church in Kentucky is giving away free guns as door prizes in the hope of converting non-believers.

Whilst speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference this week, business tycoon Donald Trump referred to former President Jimmy Carter as the “the late, great”. *National Journal* [reports](#) afterwards that the Carter Center has stated that the 89 year old former President is still very much alive.

*Roll Call’s Heard on the Hill* [reports](#) on the annual Congressional Hockey Challenge this week, reporting that Team Lawmakers beat Team Lobbyists.

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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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