

March madness for Obamacare, drafting Ted Cruz, and should Democrats distance themselves from Obama? – US national blog round up for 15– 21 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

On Sunday *Outside the Beltway* [examines](#) recent reports that Millennials (those under 35), have ‘abandoned’ President Obama. They say that while crowds of young people may no longer be thronging to the President’s rallies, and that they seem to be reluctant to sign up for Obamacare, this does not mean their support for Obama has completely disappeared. On Monday, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) that the Obama administration is less transparent than ever, despite its promises, after it came to light that it had withheld more files and information under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act. Meanwhile, *RedState* writes that Obama is [dismantling](#) ‘the rule of law’ by acting to curtail deportations and other immigration reforms without Congress. In White House news, *Caffeinated Politics* [reports](#) this week that the White House Press Secretary, Jay Carney, will be resigning soon. They say that, after the Presidency, Press Secretary may be the best job in the White House.

The Left Coaster [argues](#) that in the lead up to this year’s mid-term elections, Democrats need to begin to distance themselves from the President, given the administration’s mistakes on Obamacare, its apparent failure to focus on an economic agenda, and its stance on civil liberties and Wall Street. On Monday, *Occasional Planet* [writes](#) that Democrats need to be more welcoming to candidates ahead of the mid-terms, after an underwhelming filing experience in Missouri. Though things may seem bad for the Democrats at the moment, *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that they should cheer up – at least they are not the Republicans, who they see as having a problem of candidates with extreme views. One problem the Democrats don’t have is fundraising. *Roll Call’s At the Races* [reports](#) on Thursday, that the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee raised \$1.3 million more than its GOP counterpart in February.

Looking towards the 2016 election, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that the likely Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, has been putting distance between herself and Obama, by making unusually harsh comments about Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recent actions in Ukraine. They say that her remarks show that Clinton is ‘shoring’ up her reputation for toughness ahead of a 2016 presidential bid, and that she wants to avoid being swept up in recent criticisms of Obama on foreign policy.

On Monday, the newly re-launched *FiveThirtyEight* looks at the thirty six gubernatorial races that will take place this coming November. They [write](#) that, in the past two decades, these elections have correlated with Presidential elections, mostly because state politics does not draw voters’ interests’ as much as national politics.

Moving to the Republican Party, on Saturday, *PoliticusUSA* [looks](#) at comments made by the Republican National Committee Chairman, Reince Priebus, last week on the party’s Presidential nomination process. Priebus would like to reduce the number of primary debates and move the Republican National Convention to earlier in the year. They say that this is step to get a handle on the potentially embarrassing fringe of the party. *Crooks & Liars* [covers](#) further comments made by Priebus in support of Congressman Paul Ryan (R-WI), who had blamed poverty on ‘inner cities’.

PoliticusUSA looks at Texas Senator Ted Cruz and the influence of his father, Rafael Cruz. They [say](#) that the older Cruz has made a living from making controversial statements, and that it is likely that his son shares many of the same types of views. Ted Cruz is currently a strong supporter of the investigation into the Internal Revenue Service’s alleged targeting of conservative and Tea Party groups. *United Liberty* [reports](#) on Thursday that the Justice Department has denied a request from Cruz for a special prosecutor to be appointed to oversee the

investigation. Ted Cruz is also a potential contender for the 2016 presidential election. This week, *RedState* made the case for [drafting Cruz](#) for 2016 as a 'full-spectrum conservative'. Cruz may well not need to be drafted; on Tuesday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that he has made four trips to Iowa in eight months, the same state that kicks off presidential voting. If he does run, Cruz is likely to face a significant challenger in the form of Senator Rand Paul. On Thursday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that while the two have had a few disagreements already over foreign policy issues, the battle between the two of them is only just beginning, especially on social issues.



Ted Cruz Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

Another Republican who made waves as a potential 2016 presidential candidate this week was cable news, radio talk show host, and former Congressman Joe Scarborough. *The Lonely Conservative* [writes](#) that Scarborough was treated like a GOP 'rock star' at a Republican Conference in New Hampshire this weekend. *Crooks & Liars* [says](#) that if he is intending on running for president, then MSNBC needs to get him off the air. On Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* gives another ranking of GOP 2016 presidential candidates – Jeb Bush is now at the top of the list, mostly because of the fallout from New Jersey Governor Chris Christie's bridge scandal. Meanwhile, on a more general note, *The Hill's Congress blog* [wrote](#) this week that the GOP is not likely to win the White House in 2016 without moving forward on immigration reform this year, as most Republicans are in favor of it, at least in some form.

With this year's mid-terms in mind, *Perspectives* reports that the GOP is offering a [20-year old health care plan](#) as an alternative to Obamacare. Looking more to the electoral math, *RedState* [examines](#) the current Senate map for the mid-terms, which they say shows that the GOP may end up with a narrow majority. *Outside the Beltway* seems to agree, [writing](#) on Tuesday that the Republicans hold the edge in the battle for the Senate, mostly due to retirements and the fact that many who are up for re-election this year were last elected in 2008's Democratic wave.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Saturday, *The Feed* [says](#) that as a consequence of the controversy over the surveillance activities of the National Security Agency, the Obama administration is giving up state control of ICANN, the agency that assigns internet addresses. *United Liberty* [says](#) that some are concerned that the move could see more internet regulation from China or the United Nations, and that the transition should not be politicised.

On Monday, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that a U.S. Attorney in Washington has insisted that the state's marijuana dispensaries are illegal, but will only have action taken against them if they move into an 'enforcement priority' area that had previously been outlined by the Deputy Attorney General. Meanwhile, in Washington DC, *FreakOutNation* [writes](#) that a group of House Republicans want to sue President Obama for not arresting people for marijuana in states where it has been legalized (it remains illegal at the federal level).

Moving to the Senate, *Red State* [reports](#) that some vulnerable red-state Democrats may be willing to oppose President Obama's choice for the Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, as he is in favour of gun control on health grounds. On Monday, the *Brennan Centre for Social Justice* takes a [close look](#) at Senator Dianne Feinstein's speech on the Senate floor, which levelled charges at the CIA of false accusations against staff on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and that the agency obstructed the committee's investigation into its post 9/11

interrogation program. They say that while her committee's inquiry into CIA torture has been laudable, it has not been so rigorous when it comes to investigating domestic spying. *Informed Comment* [reports](#) on comments from Democratic Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi on Feinstein's speech – they say that her comments on why Congress is afraid of the CIA also hint at more 'nefarious' activity from the agency.

Last month, long sitting Congressman John Dingell announced his retirement, with his wife, Debbie Dingell to contest his Michigan seat in the fall. On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* uses this opportunity to take a look at [the history of women inheriting their husband's Congressional seats](#) – something that has happened 47 times.

Last week the Senate reached a deal to extend emergency unemployment insurance, which was cut off in November. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Wednesday that Republican House Speaker John Boehner is looking for reasons to kill the bill, pointing to issues with retroactive implementation, and screening people who have made \$1 million or more in the previous year.

Foreign policy and defense

On Sunday, with crises developing or progressing in the Middle East, *The Hill's Congress blog* [says](#) that the U.S.' credibility abroad is at risk due to President Obama's confused inaction – especially over Syria. Meanwhile, *Crooks & Liars* reports that Obama this week met with Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas, with the aim of keeping a US peace drive 'alive'. They [say](#) that Obama seems much interested in prolonging the peace initiative than wither Israel or the Palestinians are.

The Feed [covers](#) ongoing tensions between the U.S. and India over the second indictment of Indian diplomat Devyani Khobragade. New Delhi is frustrated at the second indictment, after the first was dismissed earlier this week. They say that President Obama should bring this matter to a close, and issue a pardon for Khobragade, out of respect for India.

The crisis in the Ukraine stayed in the news this week, after the people of Crimea voted in a referendum to secede. The *National Journal* [argues](#) that the U.S. can actually do very little in Ukraine, despite declaring the referendum and its result illegal,

other than sending more aid to Ukraine and expand sanctions. Meanwhile, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that GOP Senator John McCain has attacked Obama for not offering military assistance to Ukraine, and *The Foundry* [says](#) that Russian President Putin is launching a new version of the 'evil empire', and that the U.S. needs to institute a hard-line sanctions policy. On Tuesday, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that Vice-President Joe Biden has said that U.S. military exercises in the Baltics are under consideration. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Thursday that President Obama had announced that the U.S. had expanded sanctions to cover more Russians, including a St. Petersburg based bank. *Red State* is not impressed with Obama's actions, saying that they are [too little, too late](#), and that so-called 'smart sanctions' like these do not work.

Affordable Care

With less than two weeks remaining before the deadline under Obamacare's individual mandate arrives at the end of March, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) that 'March madness' has set in for the program. *Daily Kos* [says](#) on Monday that the



President Barack Obama tells Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas goodbye in a first floor hallway after concluding meetings in the West Wing of the White House, March 17, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

program has officially reached 5 million enrollees as of this week, and that the administration's goal of 6 million sign-ups by the end of March is now likely to be reached. On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* looks at Obamacare's 'hidden winners', the around 6 million Americans who are buying insurance on the individual market, but are not eligible for subsidy. They [say](#) that many are finding that their new insurance options are far better and less precarious than they were under the old, pre-Affordable Care Act system.

Not all commentators were quite so positive about Obamacare this week. On Tuesday, *United Liberty* [writes](#) that 35 percent of currently uninsured Americans do not plan on buying health insurance via Obamacare – mostly due to the cost of coverage. *The Foundry* is similarly downbeat, [saying](#) that, taking results from a Colorado poll, many Latinos disapprove of Obamacare, which should be troubling for the White House, as they make up a disproportionate amount of America's uninsured population. On Wednesday, *Hit & Run* [says](#) that health industry sources have revealed that Obamacare premiums may double in some parts of the country, because of the way state insurance markets work, and administrative changes to the program. Finally, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) that the Obama administration is spending as much as \$17 million every month to 'sell' Obamacare to young Americans.

The economy and society

On Sunday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at *Vergara v. California*, what they describe as 'the most dangerous lawsuit you probably haven't heard of'. The suit would overturn basic laws that allow teachers to be flexible in the classroom, alleging that the laws violate California's constitution by denying children in public schools their right to a quality education. They say the real motivation behind the suit is to eliminate obstacles to privatizing the education system.

On Monday, *Informed Comment* [ponders](#) whether or not consumerism has killed the American revolutionary spirit. Also looking at community spirit, *The Foundry* [writes](#) that volunteerism in America has hit a 10-year low, something they ascribe to a decline in religious practice throughout the last decade. *The American Prospect* [looks](#) at the history and development of the relationship between evangelicals and Catholics against contraception.

The U.S. spends millions fighting the so-called War on Drugs every year. On Monday, *The Atlantic* [covers](#) comments from General John F. Kelly, the head of U.S. Southern Command, that he has inadequate resources to go after illegal drugs flowing in from Latin America. They say that the U.S. has a black market problem, not a drugs problem, and that the trade-offs of prohibition need to be more carefully considered. Staying on drugs, on Wednesday, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that a challenge in Nevada to a State law that prevents those who have a medical marijuana license from buying guns has been thrown out. On more general crime issues, *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) on Wednesday that despite statistics showing a fall in violent crime, politicians continue to fund law enforcement, and encourage them to act like 'soldiers'.

On Tuesday, *PoliticoUSA* [writes](#) that the states run by Republicans, especially in the south, have the country's highest poverty rates. Looking at the job market for teens, *United Liberty* [writes](#) that it is the toughest on record, and that this is mostly down to Democrats' interventionist policies that often do more harm than good. *The Volokh Conspiracy* has more on this, taking a look at the effectiveness of federal social programs – they [say](#) that a study of such programs over the past 50 years shows that they consistently fail to meet their objectives. On jobs, *Wonkblog* [says](#) that the gender wage gap has not moved in a decade, mostly because of stagnant wages for women.

And finally...

The Lonely Conservative [solves the mystery](#) of the unusual posters of Ted Cruz that have been popping up in Los Angeles recently.

Crooks & Liars [profiles](#) a bar in Washington DC that has banned tipping in favour of paying its staff a living wage of \$15 an hour.

The Atlantic [looks](#) at why so few books from the 20th century are available as ebooks – mostly because they are not in the public domain.

Featured image credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

Please read our comments policy before commenting.

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.

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/1oFtX3V>

- CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 2014 LSE USAPP