

Jindal's Obamacare alternative, the GOP's eight pivotal Senate seats, and is the campaign finance system now more unequal? – US national blog round up for 29 March – 4 April

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

Last week saw controversy over Nate Silver's *FiveThirtyEight* blog prediction that the Democrats were likely to lose control of the Senate in this November's mid-term elections. On Sunday, *PoliticusUSA* [argues](#) that Silver's prediction may actually be good news for the Democrats, as it may be reflecting a short-term shift away from them on the part of baby-boomers, which will turn around as more young people begin to embrace the Democrats. On Saturday, *The Political Carnival* [echoes](#) this view, looking at recent polling that says that young people are now much more solidly Democratic than previous generations, reflecting the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the population.

While many commentators now seriously doubt that the Democrats will be able to retain the Senate this year, *National Journal* [looks](#) into what future elections might hold. They say that the Senate may flip to and from Democratic and GOP control over the next three elections, meaning that we are in for continuing political stalemate for some time to come. Back on this year's election, *The Monkey Cage* [examines](#) the eight most pivotal Senate seats – the most likely for them to win is Montana, New Hampshire, the least.

On Monday, *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that the GOP has been attempting to woo female voters by explaining to them that the Democrats' focus on equal pay is a distraction from the difficulties with Obamacare. They say that the strategy is insulting, and that women will see through it. One of the main criticisms that have been levelled at Republicans over their tactics on Obamacare has been their lack of an alternative. On Wednesday, *Red State* [says](#) that there is now a GOP healthcare plan, in the form of Louisiana Governor, Bobby Jindal's proposal to return to a model of voluntary healthcare insurance with lower costs and greater competition.

Looking ahead to the 2016 Presidential race, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Monday that a group of influential Republicans, many of who, were financial backers of Mitt Romney in 2012, are encouraging Jeb Bush (brother of former President George W. Bush) to run. One Republican who GOP donors are not banking on is New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, reports *Crooks & Liars*. They [say](#) that the focus has moved to Bush over Christie due to the latter being tarred in last year's 'Bridgegate' scandal. On Tuesday – April 1st – *United Liberty* has some fun, writing that another potential 2016 hopeful, Rand Paul, has [quit the GOP and joined the Libertarian Party](#).

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Monday, *The Foundry*, [offers](#) a helpful suggestion for a way that the federal government can save \$136 million for taxpayers – by switching from its current document typeface from Times New Roman to Garamond, as it would take up less space on the page, thus losing less ink.

On Saturday, *The Hill's Congress Blog* reports on the House of Representative's approval last week of a 12 month 'fix' to prevent physician payment cuts. They [say](#) that the fix needs to be replaced by a more permanent system of stable updates. Staying in the House, on Tuesday, *The Foundry* [reports](#) that Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) has released his Path to Prosperity Budget, which seeks to balance the federal budget within ten years. They say that while the budget does propose major cuts to Obamacare and reforms to Medicare and Medicaid, it does not make its structural reforms fast enough, given the scale of the fiscal

challenges that are faced.

Moving to the Senate, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that while an emergency unemployment insurance extension is set to be passed by the Senate this week, it is unlikely that it will even reach the floor of the House. They say that the GOP Speaker, John Boehner, opposes the bill because state agencies will have a hard time implementing its provisions in the narrow window of time allowed. On Thursday, *FreakOutNation* [reports](#) that the Senate's Intelligence Committee has voted to declassify parts of its report into the CIA's detention and interrogation practices in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The White House will now have to formally declassify the report.

On Wednesday, *The Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at the ramifications of the Supreme Court's decision to strike down aggregate contribution limits to political candidates and party committees. They say that the decision will make the current unequal campaign finance system even more so, by further empowering a set of elite donors to set agendas.

Foreign policy and defense

On Tuesday, *The Foundry* [writes](#) that the recent crisis in the Ukraine shows that the U.S. should do more to support its Polish allies. They say that the U.S. has deployed additional F-16 jets to Poland and airmen, but it also needs to invest in a missile defense system in the country and tracking radar in the Czech Republic. On Wednesday, *National Journal* [reports](#) that tensions between Russia and the U.S. over the former's invasion of Crimea have reached into space, as the U.S. space agency, NASA, has suspended its contacts with Russian government representatives.

Recent weeks have seen controversy over proposals to reduce the number of uniformed personnel in the U.S. military. On Thursday, *The Hill's Congress Blog* [writes](#) that the plan to 'shelter' the military's civilian employees undermines U.S. security, and that Congress needs to look into ways to cut this large civilian 'tail'.



U.S. Supreme Court Credit : OZinOH (Creative Commons BY NC)

Affordable Care

Monday, March 31st was the final day in which people could sign up for Obamacare on its Healthcare.gov website. *United Liberty* [reports](#) that despite all the reminders for people to enrol throughout March, the site crashed on Monday, making it difficult for people to actually enrol. The *National Journal* uses the ending of the enrollment period as an opportunity to ask whether or not it will continue to survive. They [say](#) that questions remain such as over the true number of signups, how people will respond to higher insurance premiums or fines if they did not enrol, and whether or not the Democrats will continue to take the blame for Obamacare's problems. On the topic of Obamacare's enrollment levels, *Daily Kos* says that a GOP Senator, John Barrasso has dismissed White House reports that enrollment had reached 6 million, saying that they were 'cooking the books'. They [say](#) that Barrasso doesn't actually believe that the White House is being misleading on enrollment numbers; rather that he is concerned that the growing level of support for Obamacare is a threat to the GOP's political prospects.

Looking more closely at support for Obamacare, *PoliticusUSA* also [writes](#) on Monday that a recent poll has found that support for the Affordable Care Act is now at an all-time high of 49 percent, and for the first time more support the program than do not. Republican Senator Ted Cruz seems to have fallen foul of this increased support this week. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that he asked people via his Facebook page whether or not people were better off under Obamacare – and received a tsunami of 'Yes' votes.

On Tuesday, the White House announced that 7.1 million people had signed up for Obamacare, writes *Wonkblog* – something they [say](#) doesn't really matter for the future of the law. What matters more is the mix of enrollees – enough healthy people are needed in order to offset the cost of sicker patients.

The economy and society

On Monday, *Informed Comment* writes that the corporate giant Walmart has admitted that its profits depend on its workers needing to use food stamps and other public assistance programs. They [say](#) that any restrictions in food stamps and similar measures could have major ramifications for Walmart's bottom line. Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* looks at recent reports that women's wages are rising, at the same time that family incomes have not improved. They [say](#) that the discrepancy is mostly down to declining labor-force participation for men, falling marriage rates and a levelling off of maternal labor-force participation rates.

While many have heard of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, that would take tar sands from Canada to refineries near the Gulf of Mexico, *Crooks & Liars* shines a spotlight on five similar tar sands pipeline projects that are [less well known](#). Moving to more environmentally friendly programs, on Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at bike share schemes in New York and Washington DC. New York's is struggling financially while DC's is flourishing. They say that the New York scheme's problem may be its own popularity.

On Wednesday, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) on a new poll that confirms that a majority of Americans feel that marijuana should be legal, and that as many as 75 percent believe that its prohibition will eventually be repealed.

And finally...

Roll Call's Heard on the Hill [looks](#) at House Speaker John Boehner's first BuzzFeed posting – explaining the GOP's spending blueprint using GIFs from the *How I Met Your Mother* TV series.

Crooks & Liars has a list of [the dumbest things Presidents have said](#).

FreakOutNation [looks](#) at the case of a would be GOP Senate candidate who was unable to file for the upcoming New Jersey Primary because he was stuck in traffic and missed the filing deadline.

Featured image - Governor Bobby Jindal of Louisiana credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

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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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