

Obama the fundraiser in chief, the ‘Let me Google that for you Act’, and is the GOP softening on gay marriage? – US national blog round up for 12 – 18 April

USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson, and Assistant Editor, Natalie Allen look 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 the resignation of the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius. Formerly the Governor of Kansas, this week many commentators reported that Sebelius was considering running for the Senate in the state. On Wednesday, *Red State* [writes](#) that even if she had not been responsible for the disastrous rollout of the Healthcare.gov website, the fact that that Kansas has not sent a Democrat to the Senate since 1939 (along with President Obama’s poor ratings there), makes any potential Senate bid unlikely to be successful. Meanwhile, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that things may be looking up for the Democrats in the House of Representatives, reporting that they are ahead of the Republicans, 48 to 42 percent, in a recent poll of voting intentions for the November midterm elections.



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On Sunday, *Daily Kos* picks up on the notion that the GOP’s majority in the House might be based on [gerrymandering or natural geographic sorting](#) (where similar ethnicities cluster together thus influencing election outcomes). They say that while both tendencies do play a role, gerrymandering leads to ‘coronations’ for legislators, which then discourages challengers to incumbents. Still on the Republican Party, *PoliticusUSA* looks at the party one year on from their ‘autopsy report’, written in the wake of 20 their 2012 presidential election loss. They [say](#) that despite the report’s concerns about the party’s alienation of large groups of voters, such as young people, their outreach methods will not work, as their agenda of limiting voting rights and stance on gay rights and abortion will continue to turn off young people. On the other hand, however, *National Journal* [writes](#) on Monday that the GOP’s recent New Hampshire Freedom Summit, was curiously absent of critiques of gay marriage, and that senior attendees turned their argument against it from an ethical to a constitutional one, where it is up for individual states to decide on its legality.

Senators Rand Paul and Ted Cruz are seen by many as likely contenders for the GOP’s nomination for the 2016

presidential campaign. *The Atlantic* writes on Monday that while Paul has been methodically planning his presidential run, Cruz's support from the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party was more apparent at the Freedom Summit (mentioned above). They [say](#) that Tea Party activists were more impressed by Ted Cruz's theatricality and focus on 'conservative red meat' than Paul's 'cerebral' appeal. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell is facing a tough midterm race against Democrat Alison Lundergan Grimes this November, and is currently trailing her in the polls. *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at his various recent campaign gaffes, including the ridiculous image of him holding a gun at the CPAC conferences earlier this year, but says that his real problem is more to do with his low job approval rating in Kentucky. Another senior Republican Senator, John McCain may also be under threat, but this time it is from within his own party. *United Liberty* [writes](#) that McCain's stance on amnesty for undocumented immigrants mean that it is time he faced a primary challenger that would be likely to unseat him.

Moving to the Republican Party in Congress, *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) that Tea Party Representative, Ted Yoho has recently questioned whether or not the Civil Rights Act is constitutional. Another GOP Representative in difficulty is Louisiana's Vance McAllister, who is facing calls to resign after a video of him kissing a woman who was not his wife was leaked. *Caffeinated Politics* [writes](#) on Monday that McAllister should not resign simply to save the party some bad PR, and that voters will choose whether or not to punish him at the next election.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at recent comments from President Obama that the 113th Congress looks set to become the least productive in history, having passed only 23 bills that have become laws. They caution, however, that the idea of Congressional 'productivity' is a loaded term given that Obama can claim that it is unproductive only insofar that it has not enacted his agenda, and the GOP can claim that it has been productive by blocking that agenda. On Thursday, *Red State* looks at Obama's negotiations this week with the House over immigration reform. They say that Obama was insulting and argumentative, and that Republicans cannot trust him to enforce all of parts of any comprehensive reform, not just the parts he wants enforced. They [say](#) that House Majority Leader, Eric Cantor, criticized Obama this week for attacking the people in Congress he hoped to have a dialogue with over the issue.

Sabato's Crystal Ball writes on the various ways that members can leave the House of Representatives, saying that 50 members of the 113th Congress have left, or signalled that they will leave. Despite this seemingly high number, they [say](#) that turnover in the House in this cycle is not especially high, especially in comparison to the 102nd Congress of 1991 – 1992 which saw 73 non-election exits.

On Monday, *The Monkey Cage* looks at a new study that examines Obama's judicial appointments, [writing](#) that while Obama is more liberal in his appointments than recent Republican presidents, he is no more liberal than recent Democratic presidents. *The Atlantic* writes that Obama has attended more than 370 fundraisers in his five years in office – way ahead of where George W. Bush or Bill Clinton were at the same time in their presidential terms. They [say](#) that with the Supreme Court's recent decision to remove the cap on the aggregate amount that donors can send to candidates and parties are only likely to make Obama's role as 'fundraiser in chief' more significant.

The National Technical Information Service (NTIS) is the federal agency tasked with collecting and distributing government funded research information and reports, and has lost over \$11 million in the last 11 years on its products. *The Foundry* [writes](#) on Tuesday that the loss-making agency is the target of the newly introduced "Let Me Google That For You Act" which would shut down the agency. They note that 74 percent of the agency's reports produced between 1990 and 2011 were available elsewhere, and that only 8 percent of its 2.5 million reports were sold between 1995 and 2000.

Foreign policy and defense

On Saturday, *The Foundry* looks at five ways that they [say](#) President Obama's foreign policies have failed: the empty 'pivot' to Asia; a bungled relationship with Morocco and Libya; continuing problems in the Middle East such as Iraq and Iran; Latin America's 'civil war'; and ignoring China's presence in Antarctica. Meanwhile, *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that a top NATO commander has warned that countermoves to Russia's recent actions in Ukraine

could include deploying American troops to alliance states in Eastern Europe. Back at *The Foundry*, on Sunday, they [write](#) that Obama's post-Iraq and Afghanistan strategy of downsizing the military is problematic. They [say](#) that the state-based National Guard needs to be maintained as an essential component of the Army, and that the President and Congress need to provide them with the resources that they need.

Affordable Care

President Obama was able to deliver some good news this week reporting 8 million people have signed up for the health insurance exchanges. *Daily Kos* takes this news into consideration, [reminding](#) us not to forget that 5.7 million people will be uninsured in 2016 because 24 states have not expanded Medicaid. Keeping on this theme, *Wonkblog* observes that a new report from Gallup shows that states which have "[embraced the law have seen a larger decline in the uninsured rate](#)," than those who have not, but that overall the uninsured rate dropped to 15.6 percent from 17.1 percent from the fourth quarter of 2013 and the first quarter of 2014.

The cost of the Affordable Care Act and health insurance continues to be a matter of debate. On Saturday, *White House Dossier* examines a new survey from Morgan Stanley that finds that insurance premiums have increased due to changes implemented by Obamacare, [writing](#) that someone was always going to have to pay for the Affordable Care Act and it is now clear who that will be. On Monday, *Wonkblog* [looks at](#) some very different numbers from the Congressional Budget Office, which predicts that the health care expansion will cost \$104 billion less than originally projected, principally because premiums will be cheaper than originally estimated.

With news of Kathleen Sebelius' resignation now a week old, thoughts are turning to her potential replacement, Sylvia Matthews Burwell. *Liberaland* [reports](#) that Texas Senator Ted Cruz has not lost sight of his goal of repealing the Affordable Care Act and intends to use Burwell's nomination proceedings to "examine the failures that are Obamacare."

Looking ahead to the 2014 elections *Rothenblog* [predicts](#) that the "Game of Anecdotes" is coming, with both sides collecting anecdotes from those who have been positively and negatively affected by the Affordable Care Act. Two such ads have already debuted in Alaska for Senator Mark Begich, and in Michigan as an attack against Congressman Gary Peters.

The economy and society

With April 15th this past week, many had taxes on their minds. On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the idea return-free filing has been around for many years, but has not come to pass largely because of efforts from Intuit, the makers of Turbo Tax, despite the findings of a 1996 Government Accountability Office study which found that around 45 percent of taxpayers could benefit from such a program. Meanwhile, *Hit & Run Blog* [breaks down](#) how your tax dollar is divided up, using the proposed 2014 budget.

In other tax news, *Occasional Planet* looks at how corporations can legally stash profits offshore to avoid paying taxes, after a recent Huffington Post report that the number of untaxed offshore profit is near \$2 trillion. They [say](#) that is a growing problem, but few in Washington are willing to propose an outright end to profit offshoring, and most who wish to reform tax law want to do so in such a way that would be generous to offshoring companies, despite the fact that the US Treasury loses an estimated \$345-500 billion a year.

Shifting gears, *The Foundry* writes that President Obama has been exaggerating the pay gap between men and women, [arguing](#) instead that the real wage crisis is that women may actually earn more than men in the near future, which could be disruptive to family stability, as women may view men as economically expendable if they were no longer the primary breadwinners.

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [looks back](#) at the movement to decriminalize marijuana in the 1970s, which ultimately failed after Jimmy Carter's point man on drug policy was accused of using cocaine at the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws' Christmas party and of writing a prescription under a false name. The ensuing backlash eventually led to Ronald Reagan's "War on Drugs," and they caution current cannabis campaigners that legalization is not inevitable.

And finally...

FreakOutNation [reports](#) that a wayward squirrel caused about \$300,000 in damage to a community center in eastern Indiana. Unfortunately, the squirrel died while wreaking havoc on the building's electrical equipment and cannot be held accountable for the costs.

Outside the Beltway [writes](#) that an unlucky BMW owner in Boston had the windows of the new car smashed by firefighters so they could access the hydrant the vehicle was blocking.

The Atlantic [looks at](#) *Beverage Industry's* report on the Beer World in the U.S. over the past year.

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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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