

## Senate millionaires vote against minimum wage rise, Boehner in trouble with Republicans, and should the death penalty be eliminated? – US national blog round up for 26 April – 2 May

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

With the 2014 mid-terms on the horizon, *Daily Kos* [looks at](#) the sitting members of the House of Representatives who are in danger of losing their party's re-nomination in the upcoming primaries. While this has only happened 31 times since 1994, they identify 6 Democrats and 11 Republicans who should start fearing for their jobs. They may need to add Congressman Michael Grimm to the list, who became infamous for threatening to throw a reporter off a balcony in January. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the Congressman is now in federal custody for charges related to business deals made before he was elected to Congress. One Congressman that will definitely not be back after the midterms is Louisiana's Representative Vance McAllister, *Roll Call* [reports](#) that McAllister will not seek re-election after surveillance footage of the married McAllister kissing one of his staffers was leaked to the media.

Turning to the 2016 Presidential election, Elizabeth Warren continues to disappoint progressives' hopes that she will run for President, as she recently told reporters that she hopes Hillary Clinton runs. *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that they believe Warren honestly does not have any intention to run, but that this could change if Hillary decides not to pursue the nomination. *National Journal* [examines](#) the staying power of the Benghazi scandal, arguing that it is not a deal breaker for a Hillary Clinton presidential run, but Republicans will keep the story in the headlines, if only to mobilize their base.



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Sticking with 2016, but moving across the aisle, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that Ted Cruz and Rand Paul may have driven some "big money Republican backers" to Hillary Clinton, who they see as more reliable and easier to work with than the Tea Party "wacko birds." It remains to be seen who will be the Republican nominee in 2016, but *Outside the Beltway* [argues](#) that, 3 months after "Bridgegate," Chris Christie is still a contender, provided no information directly linking him to the scandal surfaces. Meanwhile, *Hit & Run Blog* [reports](#) on recent comments from Matt Kibbe, the president of FreedomWorks, that Libertarian's best chance for electoral success is in taking over the GOP rather than creating their own party.

On Monday, *Wonkblog* looks at long term election trends and [predicts](#) that the Democrats will soon hold a significant advantage in the Electoral College. Also on Monday, *FiveThirtyEight* [examines](#) age in Congress, finding that this is the second oldest Congress, with an average age of 57.6; Democrats tend to be older than Republicans with an average age of 59.6 compared to 55.8. Back with *Wonkblog*, on Tuesday, they [report](#) that

there is some evidence that you can buy your way into national political office as candidates themselves were responsible for an average of 27 percent of contributions in 16 high-dollar primaries this year.

## Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

House Speaker John Boehner found himself in some trouble after his recent parody of fellow Republicans' opposition to working on immigration reform. *The Foundry* writes that Boehner defended his comments as loving teasing, and readjusted his message to place the blame on President Obama for the lack of progress on the issue. While Boehner has refused to bring the Senate's immigration reform bill to the House floor, *Daily Kos* reports that Texas Congressman Smokey Joe Barton recently announced that he will introduce his own comprehensive bill to legalize undocumented migrants, put those brought to the U.S. as children on a path to citizenship, and implement a guest worker program.



Speaker of the House John Boehner Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

Turning to education, *Red State* decries Common Core, a set of federal K-12 education standards, and calls for the Department of Education to be eliminated, writing that education is the responsibility of family and communities first and the federal government last.

*The Lonely Conservative* criticises Senate majority leader Harry Reid for “staging a phony vote” in light of reports that Reid is considering a non-binding resolution on the Keystone XL Pipeline. The resolution could be legally be ignored by the White House, and would effectively keep the status quo on the pipeline question.

On Wednesday, the Senate failed to pass a bill that would raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour, *PoliticusUSA* denounces the Senate Republican millionaires who voted against the bill as carrying out their own style of class warfare and seeking to create a bifurcated society of haves and have nots. Meanwhile, *Informed Comment* writes that the Supreme Court has taken a positive step forward for the environment as they ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency has the authority to regulate air pollution that moves across state lines.

*Wonkblog* reports on one surprising benefit to election years, though both the House and the Senate spend fewer days in session and Congressmen tend to introduce fewer bills, both houses of Congress pass more legislation, nearly double the amount passed in non-election years.

## Foreign policy and defense

Secretary of State John Kerry found himself in hot water this week, after he commented in a closed-door meeting that Israel risked becoming an apartheid state. *Outside the Beltway* writes that Kerry's remarks were not unique and the point he was trying to make was not controversial, but that the comments were an error for political and diplomatic reasons. *The Lonely Conservative* reports that Ted Cruz has called for Kerry's resignation over the comments, but they say Republicans should not hold out hope anything will come of the comments.

On Monday, *The American Interest* looks at the 10 year defense agreement that President Obama signed with the Philippines, writing that the treaty is a product of both Obama's Asian pivot and China's territorial aggression in the South China Sea.

## Affordable Care

*Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the Affordable Care Act continues to face publicity issues, as polls from the Kaiser Family Foundation show that the majority of Americans still think that the target for enrollments wasn't met, although 8 million people have now signed up. *Hit & Run Blog* [challenges](#) the 8 million number, arguing that those who have not yet paid their first month's premium have not actually signed up. They report that Republicans on the House Energy & Commerce Committee found that only 67 percent of enrollments have actually paid, which reduces the overall number to 5 million, although they note that this number leaves out high participation states with their own exchanges.

On Monday, *The American Interest* [looks at](#) the back-end problems with the healthcare.gov website, saying that the issues have made it so many insurers do not have an accurate count of their new customers, forcing them instead to rely on an error-prone "interim accounting process." *Hit & Run Blog* also [traces](#) these back-end problems, writing that the administration does not have a timeline for fixing these issues which could "put the entire health insurance industry at risk."

And on Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [examines](#) why many who are uninsured failed to sign up for health care this year, finding that cost was the primary reason for staying uninsured.

### **The economy and society**

Reflecting on last week's decision by the Supreme Court that Michigan's voters had the right to ban racial preferences in university admissions, *The Foundry* [argues](#) that these types of affirmative action policies actually hurt their intended beneficiaries by imposing the 'soft bigotry' of low expectations on minority groups and delegitimizing their existing successes. Still on inequality issues, *Hit & Run* takes a close look at the implications of flat state income taxes. They say that while some commentators say that flat taxes, which are often low, help to worsen inequality by limiting state's resources, whilst others argue that the actual differences in inequality between states that have this sort of tax regime, and those that do not, are actually quite small.

This week also saw a 'botched' execution in Oklahoma, with an inmate waking up, apparently in pain, after being given an untested three drug lethal injection cocktail. The inmate later died of a heart attack. *National Journal* [argues](#) that Oklahoma's 'veil of secrecy' over how its drugs are supplied call into question the reliability and efficacy of its lethal drugs. They also write that lethal cocktails are being procured with 'alarming inconsistency' by different states. *Caffeinated Politics* comments that, especially in light of this week's controversy, the death penalty should be eliminated in the U.S. They [argue](#) that there is no evidence that it prevents crime, and that its use is instead motivated by a desire for vengeance.

On Thursday, *National Journal* [reports](#) on a list, released by the Department of Education, of 55 U.S. colleges and universities that are currently under investigation for mishandling sexual assault cases. The list includes Ivy League schools such as Harvard and Princeton.

### **And finally...**

*FreakOutNation* [reports](#) this week that Texas Republican Ralph Hall, spent over \$30,000 of his Congressional campaign funds on luxury chocolates and ham. Later in the week (and still on a food theme), they [report](#) that more than 100 people became sick after attending a Food Safety Summit in Baltimore in early April.

*Crooks & Liars* [covers](#) the story of Madelynn Taylor, a veteran, who was told that her spouse would not be buried next to her in a veterans' cemetery, as Idaho law did not recognise their same-sex marriage. Retired U.S. Army Colonel Barry Johnson then wrote to *The Idaho Statesman* newspaper saying that that Taylor had every right to be buried next to her spouse, and offered to donate his own plot to the couple.

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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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