

Veterans Affairs scandal continues, Obamacare's overpayment woes, and is the Tea Party over? – US national blog round up for 17 – 23 May

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

This week saw President Obama come under fire from several conservative blogs with *The Lonely Conservative* leading the charge on Saturday. They [say](#) that Obama is bypassing Congress once again in light of his statement that he would like to work with Congress to help to create jobs, but will act if it does not. *White House Dossier* [queries](#) whether or not President Obama took a 5 percent pay cut as he promised when federal employees were furloughed due to the automatic budget cuts which came with last year's sequester. They say that Obama has been due to write a \$20,000 check to the federal government, but the White House has not confirmed whether or not he has done so yet. On Thursday, *United Liberty* writes that the Obama administration has been [one massive scandal and failure after another](#), as illustrated by the present scandals over Benghazi and Veterans Affairs. They write that Obama seems to have 'tuned out', something that may also happen to Americans who soon may be oversaturated by the number of ongoing scandals.

Many commentators are already looking ahead to the next President, and the 2016 election, On Sunday, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that one potential Democratic candidate, Senator Bernie Sanders (VA), has some questions about his potential rival Hillary Clinton. They say that Sanders has questioned whether or not Clinton will be strong enough to take on the powerful 'billionaire class' or to address the problems of climate change. Meanwhile, *National Journal* wonders whether or not Clinton actually owes it Democrats to run in 2016. They [say](#) that recent comments from former advisor to President George W. Bush, Karl Rove, about a head injury Clinton had in late 2012 show that there are still questions as to whether or not she may run, and that she needs to make the right decision for herself given the arduous nature of the job.

Outside the Beltway takes a [look](#) at a much closer election – this year's midterms in November. They say that a new poll that shows that the economy is very important to who voters in deciding who to vote for in Congress, which poses a problem for Democratic candidates, while immigration and marriage equality (hard issues for the GOP) are much father down voters' lists of important issues. *Red State* [covers](#) some similarly pessimistic polling news for the Democrats on Thursday, saying that new figures show that 44 percent of those who voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 aged 18-29 will vote this fall, but only 35 percent of Obama voters will do so.

Moving to the Republican Party, *Crooks & Liars* [covers](#) a recent GOP primary debate for the Idaho governorship. They say that last week's debate, which included 'a foul-mouthed biker from Nampa named Harley Brown and a bearded anti-abortion activist named Walt Bayes' show the types of extremists that the GOP are willing to accept as viable candidates. Later in the week, they [wonder](#) if the Tea Party is over, given last Friday's abysmal turnout at the American Spring 'uprising' in Washington DC. Hoping for 10 to 30 million attendees, the organizers drew only a few hundred. They write that what is now left of the Tea Party movement has been co-opted into the GOP mainstream, with none of their candidates ahead in primary polling for next week. *PoliticusUSA* catalogues another [Tea Party failure](#) on Tuesday, when after Mitch McConnell won his Kentucky Senate primary challenge against Matt Bevin, the local Tea Party put out a press statement misspelling his fall Democratic opponent, Alison Lundergan Grimes' name as 'Alison Graves', and refused to endorse him.

Moving to the wider Republican Party, on Sunday, *Red State* [argues](#) that it is now time for Senator Ted Cruz (TX) to leave the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NSRC), given that the goals supported by Cruz are not

those of the NSRC, and because he is 'beaten up' at any opportunity by the NSRC and its staff. Another GOP Senator, Marco Rubio (FL) was in the news this week when in an interview on Monday, he refused to say whether or not he had ever smoked marijuana, [writes Hit & Run](#). They say that he refused to answer the question, as George W. Bush did before him in 1998, as he has his eyes on a 2016 presidential campaign, and does not want to send a bad message to teenagers.

Looking more closely at the Republican side of the 2016 presidential race, [United Liberty writes](#) on Monday that Kentucky Senator, Rand Paul has topped a list of popular GOP candidates according to a POLITICO survey of party campaign managers and strategists, over other establishment candidates such as Jeb Bush and Chris Christie. Meanwhile, [The Atlantic](#)

[says](#) that Democrats are 'aching' for Hillary Clinton to run against the Republican establishment candidate of Jeb Bush, as her husband and former President, Bill Clinton, is much more popular than Jeb's brother, former President George W. Bush.

On Wednesday, [Roll Call's Political Moneyline reports](#) that the Democratic National Committee raised \$9.3 million in April, with nearly \$8 million cash on hand, while the Republican National Committee raised the same, but now has \$13.2 million on hand. Both party's Congressional Campaign Committees raised \$7.1 and \$4.1 million, respectively, with the Democrats having \$43.5 million in cash to the GOP's \$32.3 million. Meanwhile, [National Journal](#) looks at [the most compelling House raises](#) of this year's midterm elections. The list includes Arizona's 2nd District where incumbent Ron Barber (D) trails against GOP challenger Martha McSally by 3 percent and California's 21st where David Valadao is being challenged by Democrat Amanda Renteria in majority-Hispanic district. Looking at the Senate side of the midterms, [The Monkey Cage](#) has [updated](#) its forecast to predict a 77 percent chance of a GOP takeover in November, mostly because of their advantages in fundraising in some states such as Montana.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

The Veterans Affairs scandal continued to develop this week, with the news that the Phoenix Department may have used a secret list to hide patient waiting times. Despite his failings, President Obama continues to support Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki, [writes White House Dossier](#). They say that Obama is trying to spin the problems in the Department by saying that progress and investment has occurred, even though veterans are 'dying needlessly under his watch' because of waiting times for treatment. On Thursday, [The Monkey Cage writes](#) Veterans Affairs is no stranger to scandal over the past 100 years, and that they have made the Department better and the current cycle may lead to needed improvements in veterans' healthcare.

On Saturday, [Wonkblog](#) profiles the next head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Julián Castro. They [say](#) that the current mayor of San Antonio will likely cement Castro's rise as one of America's youngest big city mayors and a potential presidential running mate in 2016.

In the Senate this week, [PoliticusUSA writes](#) that Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), has been praised by her GOP colleagues for her recent bipartisan legislative efforts. They say that this does not mean that Republicans have moved to the left or that Warren isn't liberal, only that she is a well-rounded legislator, and that the Senate is not



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completely broken. Someone who is most certainly not popular with Republicans in the Senate is Majority Leader, Harry Reid (D-NV), who *United Liberty* [says](#) has been ruling the chamber 'almost like a dictator'. They say he has prevented Senate Republicans from amending legislation that would protect vulnerable Democrats against votes that could hurt them in the fall, despite the support of some Democrats for the amendments. Meanwhile, *The Foundry* [writes](#) that Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said on Sunday that the House panel that has been set up to probe the Benghazi attacks of September 2012, was a 'hunting mission for a lynch mob'. They say that Feinstein's dismissal of the panel flies against endorsements from former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, former CIA Director Leon Panetta, and Deputy CIA Director Michael Morell. On Thursday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the House has passed a controversial National Security Agency bill that has been stripped of its privacy protections and transparency requirements.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Monday, in an interview with David Victor, author of the book *Global Warming Gridlock, Informed Comment* [examines](#) the U.S.' role on climate change, saying that internal political gridlock makes it very hard for the country to make promises to others on action that it is going to take.

Meanwhile, *The Foundry* [says](#) that Canada's refusal to cooperate with U.S. long-range missile defense efforts leaves it vulnerable to missile attack. They say that Canada should invest in long range missile defence systems and cooperate with the U.S. on expanding existing defenses.

On Thursday, *Red State* looks at the 'meltdown' of Obama and Hillary's 'Libyan adventure', writing that as a political crisis threatens to touch off more violence in Libya, the Obama Administration is moving military assets to prepare for a potential evacuation of Americans. They [say](#) that this should not surprise anyone, as Obama's intervention in 2011 was an 'ill-conceived vanity project' that was 'certain to hand control of Libya over to Al Qaeda'.

Affordable Care

On Saturday, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) that the federal government may actually be paying too much in Obamacare subsidies through federal exchanges to up to a million people. They say that once the problem is figured out, people will have to repay the money back. In light of this new problem, *Wonkblog's* [question](#) 'Is it time for an Obamacare CEO?' is well timed. They say that there are still questions as to who is responsible for the entire program, and with less than seven months until open enrollment begins again in November, Obamacare faces new IT challenges. They write that with the issues that state exchanges are facing, there is a good case for having a single person ensure that they work properly. Still on the topic of Obamacare IT, *Roll Call's TechnoCrat* [says](#) that the Healthcare.gov has cost at least \$834 million so far, with another \$200 million requested for 2015.

One of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act was the expansion of Medicaid, but some states have refused to push this forward. On Monday, *National Review's The Agenda* [says](#) that states' decisions not to expand Medicaid are unlikely to lead to additional deaths. On Thursday, *PoliticusUSA* ties in the Veterans Affairs Scandal with Medicaid, [saying](#) that more than 258,000 veterans on low incomes are without healthcare because Republicans have refused to expand Medicaid.

The economy and society

On Tuesday, the *Brennan Centre for Justice* [looks](#) at how the National Rifle Association (NRA) 'rewrote' the Second Amendment. They say that while the Second Amendment was largely ignored for 200 years, in the 1970s Republican politicians adjusted to the NRA's new rhetoric on the importance of the right to bear arms as well as their historical reinterpretation of the Constitution.

Feeling busy? You may not be, [according](#) to *The Atlantic* this week. They say that even though we feel like we're working more, as a country, the U.S. works fewer hours than it did in the 1960s and 1980s. They also say that leisure time has changed too, so that the rich have less, and the poor, more.

The American Interest [writes](#) this week on America's changing demographics. They say that many people are changing their racial or origin categories from one census to the next, perhaps meaning that the immigration is not

as likely to reshape American politics and culture as we sometimes think it is. Meanwhile, *Wonkblog* wonders if America will ever be ready for a Congressional Committee to study reparations for slavery. They say it is not just about financial reparations, but about the recognition of the forces of discrimination that continued even after slavery's end.

And finally...

On Sunday, *Reason* profiles Tom Tryniski, a retiree who has digitized 27 million newspaper pages whilst working alone in his living room, and made them free for anyone to search.

FreakOutNation reports on a man in Oregon, who this week called 911 to ask where he could get some marijuana, and later in the week, on a Florida Sheriff's news conference on gun violence that was interrupted by gunshots.

Featured image: Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki testifies before a joint session of the House Armed Services Committee and the House Committee for Veterans Affairs at the Rayburn building in Washington D.C., July 25, 2012. Shinseki and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta testified on the ways they can make the transition from active duty service in to the veterans affairs department smoother. DoD photo by Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo (Released)

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