

Eric Cantor in shock primary defeat, most Americans now against death penalty, and are federal executives underpaid? – US national blog round up for 7 – 13 June

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 was a slightly better one for President Obama than last, with focus shifting to the Republican Party after a shock primary defeat. On Tuesday, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) on Obama's signing of an executive order this week that will increase the number of student loan debtors who will be allowed to enroll in a plan that allows them to pay only ten percent of their income every month to settle the debt, and for the debt to be wiped after 20 years. Previously, only those who took out loans prior to 2007 were eligible for this repayment plan. They say that the new measure will encourage universities to raise fees, and that Obama has only put it in place so that he can be seen to be 'doing something'. Meanwhile, *United Liberty* [says](#) that scandals are piling up for the 'incompetent and corrupt' President Obama. They say that the sheer volume of scandals that Obama faces seem to inoculate him against being brought down by any particular one, as no sooner is progress made in investigating one, another breaks, such as last week's lurch from the Veterans Affairs scandal, to the controversy of the Bowe Bergdahl prisoner swap.

This week, former Secretary of State and potential Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was interviewed by ABC's Diane Sawyer about her new book and other current issues. *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) that Clinton used the opportunity to take a 'jab' at former President George W. Bush in response to intimations from his former advisor Karl Rove that she might have brain damage following a fall some years ago. On Monday, *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that Clinton is unperturbed at renewed Republican efforts to scare her away from running for the presidency by pushing the Benghazi scandal, and that if anything, it is inspiring her to run even more.

Roll Call's Rothenblog [looks](#) at the very thin rumors that the First Lady, Michelle Obama, may be considering a Senate run in 2016. They say that while it is a classic example of an out of control media narrative based on little evidence, we should not completely discount the possibility as Democratic strategists may feel that she is the best candidate to run against Illinois Senator Mark Kirk in two years' time.



Eric Cantor Credit: House GOP (Creative Commons BY NC)

The big political news this week was the shock loss of House Majority Leader, Eric Cantor, in the Republican Primary for Virginia's 7th District on Tuesday, to a conservative college professor, David Brat. This loss came completely out of the blue, with polls predicting an easy win for the incumbent. On Monday, *Roll Call's At the Races* wrote expecting an easy win for Cantor, describing Brat's opposition as 'tepid'. In the aftermath, *The Atlantic* looks at why Cantor lost, while Lindsey Graham won his primary in South Carolina against six conservative challengers. They say that while Graham ran on immigration, pushing his support for citizenship and his willingness to work with Democrats, while Cantor tried to 'be all things to all people' on the issue, and ended up being perceived as inconsistent. They also say that Cantor's attempts to tar Brat (a deeply religious hardcore libertarian) as a 'liberal college professor' backfired on him, by elevating Brat's profile. Meanwhile, *FiveThirtyEight* writes that Cantor's loss was like an earthquake; just as the vast majority of earthquakes are small, primary challenges rarely produce catastrophic outcomes, and both are hard to predict. *Crooks & Liars* has nine reasons why Cantor's loss is bad for everyone, beginning with a critique of David Brat as a "hardcore, extreme-right-wing John Calvin-admiring Christian Reconstructionist", and ending with as a fringe party radical, he is likely to win the election in November, thus further emboldening the Tea Party.

Before Cantor's shock defeat, *Red State* looks at where conservatives and the Tea Party can win in the Senate midterm elections this November. They say that conservative and Tea Party candidates can win in 22 states, but in order to do this, they need to 'fight regularly on favorable terrain'. They also point out that they still 'win' even if they move their opponents to the right. *Roll Call's Rothenblog* writes on Monday that Senator Mark Pryor (D-AR) is still the most vulnerable Senator, despite him recently polling 10 percent higher than his GOP rival, Tom Cotton. They say that the fact that President Obama only gained 37 percent of the Arkansas vote in 2012, and his very low job approval rating in the state, is working against Pryor. Meanwhile, *Outside the Beltway* says that the odds point to a Senate takeover by the Republican Party in November, as the GOP are sure to pick up seats in at least three states, and only needs three more for a majority. One thing that may hurt Democrats this fall is President Obama, reports *Wonkblog* this week. They write that a new survey shows that the more people approve of Obama's job performance, the less likely they are to vote in the midterms. For example, young people approve of Obama the most, at 54 percent, but less than a quarter say they are certain that they will turn out to the polls.

Most commentators this week attributed Eric Cantor's shock loss to his variable stance on immigration reform. On Thursday, *Hit & Run* writes that Cantor was mostly punished for his 'big government conservatism' that saw him support expanding government power. They also say that, given 64 percent of Republicans across the U.S. favor immigration reform, the GOP needs to move away from its currently virulent anti-immigrant and immigration reform stance, and focus on pushing for smaller government.

On Tuesday, *Daily Kos* looks at what they say are New Jersey Governor Chris Christie's attempts at recovering the GOP 'mantle' for the 2016 presidential election. After months of controversy over his involvement in the *Bridgagate* scandal, Christie is travelling to half a dozen states in what they say is a 'revival tour', taking advantage of his position as the chairman of the Republican Governor's association.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Saturday, *The Political Carnival* mulls over potential choices for the recently vacated cabinet post of Secretary of Veterans Affairs. They say that all the military names being bandied around, such as Senator Jack Reed, and Retired General Stanley McChrystal, are wrong, and that a Republican should take over, potentially even a sitting GOP Senator, which would also help Democrats to keep control over the Senate. On Monday, *Daily Kos* reports that a White House ordered audit of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals has found that over 57,000 veterans who had requested an appointment had not obtained one by more than 90 days later, and nearly 64,000 who requested an appointment with the VA over the last ten years, never got one. Still on the VA scandal, *Outside the Beltway* considers whether or not federal executives are underpaid, given that their salary is capped at just over \$180,000 for a senior executive, compared to the millions that similar employees get in the private sector.

Moving to the House of Representatives, on Tuesday, *National Journal* writes that Eric Cantor's loss may be about to spark a revolution among House Republicans. Cantor was considered by many to be House Speaker John Boehner's heir-apparent, but his absence in the 114th Congress may mean that the more conservative elements of the GOP will now try and oust Boehner and House Majority Whip, Kevin McCarthy. *Wonkblog* covers additional

fallout from Cantor's loss – they [say](#) that it now means that immigration reform is very likely to be dead

Foreign policy, defense and trade

Prior to Eric Cantor's defeat this week, the controversy over the Obama administration's swap of Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl for five Taliban fighters continued. On Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) on comments from Senate Intelligence Committee Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein that despite Obama's claims that Bergdahl's health was in danger (his justification for not consulting Congress) she has seen no evidence that Bergdahl was in any significant danger prior to his release. Meanwhile, [according](#) to *Crooks & Liars* Kentucky GOP Senator Rand Paul, who was attending the annual Texas GOP convention, made a joke that President Obama should trade five senior ranking Democrats in exchange for a Marine who is now in a Mexican jail for accidentally crossing the Mexican border with three guns and 400 rounds of ammunition. On Monday, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that although Obama's release of five Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo Bay has led some to believe that Obama is on the way to emptying and then closing the prison, this is very unlikely – if he did move to close the prison, then Obama would likely face cross-partisan impeachment.

On Sunday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) on the intelligence crisis in the Obama White House. They say that Obama's recent photo-ops and foreign policy announcements do not hide the recent setbacks in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Ukraine. They say that White House fumbles, such as accidentally outing the CIA's Afghanistan station chief and Edward Snowden's continuing revelations, show that the President needs to have much more awareness of what is going on in the world. *The American Interest* [calls](#) for new U.S. bases in Central Europe this week, in the wake of President Obama's trip to that region earlier this month. They say that while Obama has laid out the issues, and reaffirmed America's commitment to the region, more action is needed. Since many European countries, such as Germany, have chosen to keep commercial relations with Russia, in spite of the crisis in Ukraine, it is now up to the U.S. to lead NATO in responding to Russian aggression with basing troops in Poland and the Baltic states.

This week also brought the news that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria had captured the city of Mosul, and continued its advance across Iraq. *The Monkey Cage* [says](#) that the absence of U.S. troops after the 2011 withdrawal is a minor part of the story, and that the main fault is in Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki who has lost Sunni Iraq through his sectarian and authoritarian policies.

Obamacare and health policy

On Monday, *Paul Krugman* takes a close look at the number of uninsured after the introduction of Obamacare, and the quality of insurance. He [says](#) that not only has the number of uninsured dropped since the end of 2013, employment has increased as well, putting paid to those who argued that the health insurance program would be a job killer. On *The American Interest*, they look at the alternatives to Obamacare, for those who are either opposed to its values or cannot afford its costs. They [say](#) groups like Christian Healthcare ministers represent a different approach that deserves more attention, as they often encourage

cost-controlling that an impersonal, national insurance system cannot. On Thursday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that President Obama has allowed 18 states to continue to delay a key part of the Obamacare health insurance exchange for small business until 2016. This 'employee choice' component, will allow employees of firms with 50 or fewer employees to choose any health plan at the value their employer has selected. One major part of Obamacare was to reduce waiting times at emergency rooms – yet *United Liberty* [reports](#) on Monday that emergency rooms have seen a huge influx of Medicaid patients, and that the problem is likely to get worse.

The economy and society

On Sunday, *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at the states that have greater income inequality; surprisingly, the three states



that are the most unequal – Washington DC, New York and Connecticut – are all dominated by liberal policies and politicians, while four of the five with the lowest inequality levels are red states. They say that this suggests that raising tax rates and the minimum wage fails to achieve greater equality, and may even make income gaps wider.

Are Americans still in favor of the death penalty? Not any more, [according](#) to a new poll reported on by *Outside the Beltway*. They write on Monday that for the first time a majority of Americans (52 percent) favor life in prison without parole over the death penalty. They say that the American public is not against the death penalty on moral grounds, just that they would rather see a murderer imprisoned rather than spending decades on death row.

Sadly, this week saw a school shooting in Oregon, one that *FreakOutNation* [says](#) was the 74th since the shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012, when Adam Lanza killed 20 children. Reflecting on another shooting incident in Las Vegas on the weekend, *Crooks & Liars* wonders why the media refuses to call white people who commit mass murder 'domestic terrorists'.

On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* reports that a Superior Court judge in Los Angeles struck down state laws in California that govern teacher tenure, meaning that the way that teachers are hired and fired will fundamentally change in the state. They [say](#) that the decision was likely to have been influenced by the testimony of economist Raj Chetty who calculated that the one year's exposure to the worst performing teachers can cost a classroom of children \$1.4 million in lifetime earnings

And finally...

On Saturday, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that the CIA has joined Twitter, with a surprisingly 'light' touch:

National Journal [attempts](#) to link the defeat of House Majority Leader, Eric Cantor, with the shutdown of the TweetDeck Twitter client on Wednesday, prompting joking speculation that Cantor made TweetDeck work, or that he had resigned in order to fix it.

On Tuesday, *FreakOutNation* [says](#) that a man in Arizona has been arrested for allegedly attempting to shoot the moon. The moon is apparently fine.

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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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