

A new scandal for Christie, Chicago's fiscal free-fall, and Ferguson's damning DOJ report: US state blog round up for 28 February – 6 March

USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson, looks at the week in U.S. state blogging. [Click here](#) for our weekly roundup of national blogs.

Northeast

In the Green Mountain State this week, *VT Digger* [reports](#) that according to a new poll, most people in Vermont support the decision of Governor Peter Shumlin to not pursue a single-payer healthcare system in the state during the current legislative session. The single-player plan was dropped by the Governor two months ago for cost reasons.

Heading south, *RI Future* of Rhode Island [looks](#) at a recent hearing in the State House over bills covering wage theft and increasing the minimum wage. They write that in the state, servers are supposed to make \$2.89 an hour, plus tips, with the restaurant making up the difference to \$9, if there is one. They say that restaurant workers' experiences with the so-called 'tipped minimum wage' can differ greatly depending on whether or not they work for a chain restaurant.

New York's *State of Politics* [writes](#) this week that the state has been reported to owe its schools \$4.9 billion in foundation aid, as part of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity agreement, with more than half is owed to schools in New York City alone. Governor Andrew Cuomo has proposed a \$1.1 billion increase in education funding for the state, which those pushing for more of such funding stating that at least double that figure would be more appropriate.

For the Republican Governor of New Jersey, Chris Christie, much of 2014 was characterized by efforts to distance himself from the 'Bridgegate' scandal over his alleged involvement in the closure of part of the George Washington Bridge in 2013.

Talking Points Memo [reports](#) on Thursday that Christie may be involved in yet another scandal – this time it involves the alleged push by his administration to settle a case with ExxonMobil over polluted wetlands that would be favorable to the company.

Staying in New Jersey, *PolitickerNJ* [looks](#) at how the news this week that Senator Bob Menendez has been charged

with corruption might affect the 2017 Democratic gubernatorial primary. They say that if the Senator is forced to resign, then this might have hard consequences for the bid of current Jersey City Mayor, Steven Fulop, of whom Menendez is an ally.



New Jersey Governor Chris Christie Credit; Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

PoliticsPA also looks ahead to elections this week, with coverage of Joe Sestak's announcement that he would be seeking to take Pennsylvania's Senate seat from incumbent Republican Pat Toomey in 2016. They [say](#) that the Democrat, and former Pennsylvania Congressman drew comments on his casual attire at the announcement, which included a pair of old Reebok sneakers.

South

This week saw the announcement of the long-serving Senator for Maryland, Barbara Mikulski. On Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [writes](#) that the Democrats have a clear edge in keeping the seat, especially given that the GOP has not won a Senate election in Maryland since 1980.

Moving over to West Virginia, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that the state's Governor, Earl Ray Tomblin has vetoed a state bill which would have banned abortions after 20 weeks. They say that Tomblin argued that the bill was unconstitutional under the precedent of the Supreme Court which prohibits the termination of certain pregnancies prior to viability.

In the Sunshine State this week, *The Shark Tank* [says](#) that Florida Democrats have floated a bill in the state legislature which would make it illegal for businesses to run background checks on potential employees. They comment that it would be a sad day for the state if the bill passes, as it would make Florida less friendly for businesses.

Alabama continued to be in the news this week on the issue of same-sex marriage. *Left in Alabama* [says](#) that the state's Supreme Court has now banned the issuing of marriage licenses to all same-sex couples across the state despite the earlier ruling of a federal court judge that the state's ban on same-sex marriages was unconstitutional.

Heading west, *The Arkansas Project* [reports](#) on Monday that a bill to allow the carrying of firearms on university campuses passed through the state House this week. They say that the so-called 'Campus Carry' bill is a step in the right direction towards the goal of making universities safer.

In Texas this week, the conservative *Big Jolly Politics* blog [takes the state's Senate to task](#) for its proposals to break the state's spending cap. They say that the move, spearheaded by Lieutenant Governor, Dan Patrick, involves rewriting the state's constitution so that tax cuts and paying off bonds early do not count towards the spending cap.

Midwest

On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) that the Mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, has apologized after a court document was filed by the city which blames 12-year old Tamir Rice for his own death in a police shooting last year. They say that the appearance of bias towards the police in situations such as this damages relations between police and civilians, which erodes public safety.

Heading west, this week, *Townhall* looks at what they say is the 'fiscal free-fall' currently being experienced by the city of Chicago, Illinois. They [write](#) that the city's debt was downgraded by Moody's last week, because of its massive unfunded pension liabilities of around \$32 billion, and a \$300 million structural deficit in its operating budget.

The *Iowa Republican* [writes](#) this week that the state's GOP is 'out of touch' with the average Iowa resident. They say that by voting in favor of an increase in the state's gas tax, the state's Republican Party may remain a minority



in the Iowa Senate, with one reason being that the tax increase may end up funding the completion of a new four-lane highway rather than the repair and maintenance of existing infrastructure.

This week also saw the release of a major report by the U.S. Department of Justice into the faults of the police force in Ferguson Missouri, in the wake of the shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer last year. *Wonkblog* has some of the report's [highlights](#), including that African-Americans are much, much more likely to be searched, arrested and have force used against them compared to other groups.

Nebraska was also in the news this week over same-sex marriage. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Thursday that the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals has stayed a federal judge's ruling that found the state's ban on such marriages to be unconstitutional.

One negative effect of the shale oil boom in states such as North Dakota has been massive pressure on housing, and as a result, increasing rents. *Say Anything Blog* [writes](#) this week that with the state's oil boom coming to an end, rents are now starting to fall.

West and Pacific

Hit & Run reports this week on a Colorado Sheriff, Justin Smith, who is seeking to reverse the legalization of marijuana in the state via a federal lawsuit. They [say](#) that while Smith is seeking for federal law (which states that it is illegal to grow, possess or distribute marijuana) to be upheld, he had done the opposite when it comes to guns, promising two years ago to defy a federal requirement for expanded background checks for gun buyers.

Heading down to Arizona, *Democratic Diva* [writes](#) on Thursday on the budget deal struck by Governor Doug Ducey and Republican legislators that will cut millions from colleges and health care providers, with the Governor explaining that for prosperity to occur, everyone must live within their means. They comment that Ducey is really just asking some to tighten their belts, given that very few people or organisations live within their means in reality.

Idaho's *Eye on Boise* this week [looks](#) at a bill currently before the state House that would end the state's twice-yearly daylight savings time changes. They say that with the bill putting the change on July 1st, the state would be on permanent daylight saving time – something that would actually be illegal under federal law.

Moving back down to the Golden State, *Capital & Main* [reports](#) that the recently announced referendum on the ban on plastic bags that was signed into law last year will effectively suspend the measure until after the vote in 2016. Plastic bags were to be banned on July 1st until the referendum, which was triggered after more than 550,000 signatures were gathered by campaigners, was announced. California politics has been the news in recent weeks with the announcement of incumbent Senator Barbara Boxer, that she would not contest the 2016 election. Many tipped the former Mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa, to run for the seat, but he has since ruled himself out of the running. *National Journal* [wonders](#) if Villaraigosa (who they say is the state's leading Latino politician) has missed his political moment in passing on the Senate in favor of a potential gubernatorial bid in 2018.

On Tuesday, *Crooks & Liars* [says](#) that Representative Don Young of Alaska has come up with a new cure for homelessness – introduce wolves.

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Former Mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa
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