

## New York's cigarette problem, Wisconsin's poor job growth, and automatic voter registration debuts in Oregon: US state blog round up for 14 – 20 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



Governor Peter Shumlin of Vermont, Credit: Community College of Vermont (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

In the Green Mountain State this week, *VTDigger* [comments](#) that Governor Peter Shumlin is a 'lame duck' given that he only 'eked' to victory in last year's midterm elections, and that his 'hands-off' approach and inability to innovate is hurting the people of Vermont. They write that Shumlin does not have a realistic chance of gaining a fourth term in 2016.

In New Hampshire, *Granite Grok* [looks](#) at the state Democratic Party's 'myth' that an \$800 million deficit never existed. They say that despite previous denials that the party left the state with that amount of debt, in a recent commentary, state Democrat, Cindy Rosenwald, all but admitted that the extra money (to help people hit by the recession) was allocated in 2011 without any specific plans of how to pay it back.

Heading south, *Mass Politics Profs* [writes](#) on Wednesday on what they say is Governor Charlie Baker's 'traitorous behavior' as described by a member of the GOP's state committee to describe Baker's decision to sign an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in support of same sex marriage. They say in his support for same sex marriage, Baker may be redefining what it means to be a Republican from Massachusetts today.

On Sunday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at opposition to New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo's education plan, writing that parents and teachers are against the plan's proposed changes to how teachers are evaluated, which in turn is linked to school funding. They say that by basing teachers' evaluations on students' test scores, Cuomo may be attempting to shift the blame to them for pupil performance which stems from the underfunding of the state's public schools from Albany. Remaining in the Empire State, *Hit & Run* reports on the effects of recent increases in cigarette taxes; now more than 60 percent of cigarettes sold are smuggled in from elsewhere. They [say](#) that New York officials think Virginia (where many of the smuggled cigarettes originate) should do something, despite New York being the reason for the problem.

Moving over to New Jersey, *Red State* [comments](#) on GOP Governor Chris Christie's public pension problems. They say that Christie is trying to deal with unfunded pensions for state employees by moving from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan, something they say will help to ensure the state's fiscal solvency, but will not win him many friends.

## South

North Carolina's *The Progressive Pulse* [writes](#) on tax changes proposed by the State Senate – they say that measures such as requiring homeowners to pay state income taxes on forgiven mortgage debt and removing deductions for students' course-related tuition expenses will punish average taxpayers at the same time as legislators have proposed giving a tax break for businesses that experience economic losses.

Moving south to Georgia, *Daily Kos* [says](#) that bills introduced into the state's Republican-controlled legislature which aim to stop the government from protecting certain groups from discrimination on the basis of people's religious beliefs should worry everyone, not just those that are LGBT. They write that these laws could lead to child and spousal abusers avoiding prosecution if they claim that they acted based on their religious beliefs.

In the Sunshine State, *Saint Peters Blog* [writes](#) this week that Florida's state legislature is now confronting an \$4 billion budget gap between the House and Senate, with only six weeks remaining in its annual session. They say that the key cause of the gap is a difference in opinion over healthcare spending, with the Senate asking for nearly \$3 billion to expand Medicaid to 800,000 Floridians who are currently not covered. House Republicans, meanwhile are dead against expanding the state's Medicaid system.



On Friday, *Something Like the Truth* of Louisiana [calls](#) on the state's Governor, Bobby Jindal, to resign, arguing that the state needs a full time governor, and not one that is often out of state, in the build up for a likely presidential campaign. They say that Jindal has done little to address the Pelican State's high rates of poverty, while 'hollowing' out the state's higher education system.

The *Arkansas Times* [says](#) that the state's holiday in honor of Confederate General, Robert E. Lee has survived once again, after a state House committee to debate the holiday (which occurs on the same day as Martin Luther King Jr. day) failed to reach quorum.

This week, *Burnt Orange Report* [argues](#) that Texas would do well to take lessons from California, which has created 100,000 more jobs than the Lone Star State in the last 12 months. They say that much of California's success is down to local progressive initiatives that senior Texas Republicans, like Governor Greg Abbott, have warned against.

Moving north, *Blue Oklahoma* [reports](#) that the state House recently passed a bill which would end marriage licensing in the Sooner State after same-sex marriage was made legal there. They say the bill would replace the current marriage licensing process so that marriage certificates would be filed with the government after a clergy member or county clerk does so.

## Midwest

On Wednesday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [looks](#) at presidential results in Ohio. They say that President Obama won

the Buckeye State twice because he maximizes his vote in the three largest counties – counties where likely Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, and Ted Strickland (former state Governor and likely to run for the Senate in Ohio in 2016) have shown weakness.

Heading west to Illinois, *National Journal* [covers](#) Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel's bid for re-election. It's now looking like that in order to win a second term, Emanuel will need the help of the city's Republicans. They comment that Emanuel is fighting liberal Democrat Jesus "Chuy" Garcia for votes, and that the election is shaping up to be one of the first of the party's internal battles between its Wall Street wing (which Emanuel represents) and its populist liberal grassroots.

*Political Heat* [writes](#) this week on a new report that shows that Wisconsin's economy has continued to slow under the leadership of Republican Governor, Scott Walker, and that the state ranks 40th in terms of job creation. They say that Walker has yet to outdo his predecessor – Jim Doyle – in terms of job creation. *The Political Environment* echoes this point, [commenting](#) that the relatively high number of people in the states with underwater mortgages works against Walker's messaging that the state is a success story. Staying in the Badger State, *Freak Out Nation* [reports](#) that a Wisconsin Judge has ruled that a state law that requires doctors performing abortions to get hospital admitting privileges was unconstitutional, stating that the benefits to women's health of the requirement were outweighed by restricting access to abortions.



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In the Mount Rushmore State, *Dakota Free Press* [comments](#) on a recent statement by state Representative, Peggy Gibson, that South Dakota's repression of women is hurting the state's economic development, and that the signals that women there do not have reproductive rights may be driving them away.

## West and Pacific

On Thursday, *Blog for Arizona* [warns](#) that the state's Tea Party Republicans are trying to criminalize voting activists with a new bill that would require community volunteers to provide photo identification that would be made publically available online, and another which would make it a felony for volunteers from a political committee to collect voters' mail-in ballots and deliver them to election officials.

Moving west, Nevada's *The Democratic Truth* [reports](#) that a GOP Assemblywoman, Michele Fiore has recently state that opponents should no longer be using the 'race card' because 'racism is over'. She followed these comments by describing an Assemblyman as a 'colored man'.



Drought affected Sand Wool Lake in Santa Clara, California 31 August, 2014 Credit: Don DeBold (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

In the Golden State this week, *National Journal* [writes](#) that Californians could spend \$100 million fighting over a 2016 ballot measure which would pave the way for cuts to public employers' pension plans. They say that the measure is now being pushed by pension-reform advocates, and that it sets the stage for a clash between labor unions and fiscal conservatives. Staying in California, *Capital & Main* [writes](#) this week that after a long drought, the state may only have one year's worth of water left. Meanwhile, *Ten Miles Square* [says](#) that a ballot measure initiated by a California lawyer which calls for the murder of homosexuals – the 'Sodomite Suppression Act' – is likely to proceed to the signature gathering stage, because of concerns over the precedent that would be set if it was to be stopped at this point by the state's Attorney General. To make it on to the ballot, more than 365,000 signatures will need to be collected.

This week also saw the introduction of a new voter registration law in Oregon, [writes](#) *Occasional Planet*. They report that the new law means that citizens are automatically placed on the voter roll if they have had an interaction with the state's Department of Motor Vehicles since 2013. The new law is designed to make registering to vote easier, and is the first of its kind in the country.

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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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