

## Ted Cruz announces for president, budget ‘vote-a-rama’, and the decline of American exceptionalism: US national blog round up for 21 – 27 March

*USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson looks at the best in political blogging from around the Beltway. Our round-up of state blogs will follow on Saturday afternoon.*

### President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Sunday, *The Lonely Conservative* looks at how President Obama ‘bullied’ the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) into regulating the internet via a recent ruling on net neutrality. They [say](#) that last November the President put out a video calling for the internet to be regulated like a utility, at the same time protestors ‘swarmed’ the home of the FCC Chair, Tom Wheeler, and called on him to listen to the President.

On Monday, *The American Thinker* [comments](#) that Democrats have ceded power to President Obama, and that they have ignored their responsibility towards upholding the constitution for the past six years. They say that the president has flouted laws through his executive actions and recess appointments, and that Democrats have cheered him on. Whether President Obama is flouting the Constitution or not, there are still 22 months remaining in his term, *The Daily Signal* [reminds](#) us. They warn that we should not get distracted by the increasing tempo of the 2016 presidential race, and that conservatives still need to keep a close eye on Congress and the White House. On Tuesday, *National Review’s The Campaign Spot* looks back, [arguing](#) that Obama has changed Washington – but not for the better. For them, President Obama, brought a great deal of ‘personal pique and pettiness’ to DC politics, and that his lack of experience in Washington meant he didn’t feel attached to anyone or anything that was there before he was.

*PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) Thursday that President Obama has threatened to veto any Republican budget bill that would unravel previous reforms of Wall Street, such as gutting the successful Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, which is cracking down on payday lenders.

### Elections and the road to 2016

On Tuesday, the *Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at low turnout in American elections, and where it matters the most. They say that rather than looking at national elections, we should instead be concentrating on local elections, from statewide races to school board contests. They comment that expanded turnout would transform representation on city councils, with Latinos and African Americans being far better represented, which would also mean more might be spent on welfare and other redistributive programs. *The Hill’s Congress blog* also [examines](#) the state of America’s democracy, this time in the form of a new ballot initiative in Maine. They say that the new ballot initiative would raise transparency and increase penalties for candidates who break campaign finance laws, and could provide a model for the rest of the country.

This week *Roll Call’s Rothenblog* [reports](#) that the Republican Senator for Indiana, Dan Coats, will not be seeing reelection next year, and that this has put the seat in competition in 2016. Until now, Coats was seen as a clear favorite for re-election. Another Senator who won’t be running for re-election in 2016 is Nevada’s Harry Reid, and former Democratic Senate Majority Leader, [reports](#) *Crooks & Liars*.

On Thursday, *National Journal* looks at what they say is the [Democrats’ ‘identity crisis’](#) which is affecting their Senate races. They comment that intraparty divisions over issues such as Israel, national security, and entitlements may lead to some nasty primaries in the lead up to the 2016 elections.

Moving to the national stage, the big news this week was Senator Ted Cruz’s (R-TX) announcement on Monday

that he was running for President, the first major GOP candidate to do so. *National Review's The Campaign Spot comments* that 50 percent of U.S. adults don't actually have an opinion about Cruz, according to recent polls, despite his being at the centre of the government shutdown debate in late 2013. *FiveThirtyEight* reacts quickly to Cruz's announcement, and not at all positively. They *write* that he is too extreme and too disliked to actually win the presidency next year. While he will get a great deal of media attention, they say, he does not have the support from senior party members, and that he is far too conservative compared to the GOP's recent nominees. *The Federalist*, on the other hand, is far more optimistic, giving *three reasons* why Cruz could actually win – that he matches to the activist base, he



Texas Senator Ted Cruz Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

has done a great deal to fight Obamacare and the president's amnesty, and he may have an advantage running as a conservative in a divided GOP establishment field. *Hit & Run* has an interesting *report* on Cruz's announcement speech which took place at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. They say that students were forced to attend or face a \$10 fine from the University for not attending the weekly convocation meeting. In the past, business magnate Donald Trump has challenged President Obama's legitimacy, accusing him of not being a natural born U.S. citizen. This week Trump emerged as a Ted Cruz 'birther' as well, *writes Freak Out Nation*, commenting on the fact that Cruz was born in Canada, and stating that Trump was unsure on how the courts would rule on this, given that the Constitution states that a president must be a 'natural-born' U.S. citizen.

On Wednesday, *Daily Kos* looks at Senator Lindsay Graham's (R-SC), potential presidential run, reporting that he is positioning himself as the 'realist' in the field, and that he thinks that the GOP will need to cut deals with the Democrats in order to survive. They *say* that a Graham candidacy is not going to happen, especially given that more than 65 percent of voters in his home state think he should not run. *Political Animal* is *excited* (possibly with tongue in cheek) at the possibility that Louie Gohmert (R-TX) might also be considering a presidential run, commenting that he has not ruled out an exploratory committee.

On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* takes a more general look at the 2016 presidential race, *commenting* on why other potential candidates are taking so long to announce as Ted Cruz has. They say that much of the delay revolves around fundraising limits in presidential campaigns of \$2,700 per donor, which many likely candidates are currently far exceeding.

### **Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda**

This week *The Atlantic reports* on a case taken up by the Supreme Court which covers whether Texas must issue license plates with the Confederate battle flag. They say that the Sons of Confederate Veterans group wants the Lone Star State to issue vanity plates with the flag, but that the state rejected their request, leading to the legal challenge. On Thursday, the *Brennan Center for Justice says* that the Supreme Court has told an Alabama court that it needs to take a closer look at the state's 2012 legislative redistricting plans, in order to determine if the districts have been racially gerrymandered. The issue centers around whether the Voting Rights Act requires minority controlled districts to contain a fixed percentage of minorities – Alabama Republicans had use the Act to concentrate African American voters into certain districts, thus diluting their overall electoral strength.

In his presidential announcement this week, Senator Ted Cruz stated that his dream was to abolish the Internal Revenue Service; *Town Hall comments* that while this is unrealistic, Cruz is correct in focusing on the IRS' 'mind-

boggling' complexity that is in dire need of reform.

This week the House actually came together to pass significant legislation in the form of the so-called 'doc fix', which overhauls how doctors and Medicare providers are paid. In the lead up to the agreement on Thursday, *Roll Call's Hawkings Here* [writes](#) that while the bill was likely to be passed by the House, things may not be so easy when it comes to the Senate. If the bill doesn't move through the Senate by the end of the month, physicians would see a 21 percent cut to reimbursements for treating the elderly, unless Congress steps in with temporary legislation for the 18<sup>th</sup> time since the 1990s.

The main action in Congress this week though was the negotiations between Republicans over their budget proposals. *Town Hall* [sets the scene](#) on Tuesday by reminding us that the GOP's budget is non-binding, and that it is mostly a symbolic document, though it does help set the top-line numbers that show what Congress can spend in the next fiscal year. Much of the controversy over the budget is that while it technically complies with 2011's Budget Control Act, by adding billions to the uncapped Overseas Contingency Operations account, it blows through the sequester cap, something that *Red State* [reckons](#) will be 'killed for good' by the GOP's 'Eeyore Caucus'. They explain that there is a great deal of wasteful spending in the Department of Defense, and also that in order to get more spending in this area, the GOP will have to push for a law that amends the Budget Control Act, something that Democrats will not let them pass without also increasing the caps on non-defense spending. On Wednesday, *Daily Kos* [says](#) that the budget's proposals hit the poor with \$5.5 billion in cuts to food stamps and Medicaid. Thursday sees what it termed by some ([including The Daily Signal](#)) the 'vote-a-rama', where the process is fast tracked to address amendments that were not a part of the previous debate on the budget resolution. On Thursday, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) that in a surprise move, the Senate has voted for a budget amendment that would allow employees to earn up to seven days of sick leave.

*The Hill's Congress blog* [looks](#) at other Congressional business this week in the form of the Restore America's Wire Act (RAWA), which would overturn state laws which legalize online gambling, and would stop states from legalizing it from now on. They say that the law is being pushed by GOP mega-contributor (and gambling magnate) Sheldon Adelson.

This week *The Atlantic* [comments](#) on how Republican lawmakers are responding (or are not responding as seems to be the case) to the aforementioned FCC ruling on net neutrality. They write that a bipartisan compromise may be on the cards which returns the internet to its status as a communications service, and not a common carrier (as it used to be), but also bars the broadband industry from implementing 'fast' and 'slow' lanes.

## **Foreign policy, defense and trade**

On Saturday, *The Atlantic* looks at the [decline of 'American exceptionalism'](#) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They say that while the U.S. can mobilize and deploy resources more effectively, and in greater numbers than any other state, American society does not belong in a different category as that of others, and policymakers face the same geostrategic challenges.

This week, *Informed Comment* [investigates](#) what the U.S. and the European Union have been doing to Iran's economy via sanctions. They have a rundown of the U.S., EU and United Nations sanctions imposed on Iran since 1979, and what it would take to lift them.

The *White House Dossier* [reports](#) on Tuesday that President Obama has announced that the U.S. will maintain its current force of about 10,000 troops in Afghanistan until the end of the year, delaying a planned drawdown after requests from Afghan and U.S. military officials. They praise Obama for taking steps to counter the establishment of what they say is another potential terrorist source, but also argue that his determination to eventually withdraw troops from the country is a mistake.

Last week saw the reelection of the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu. *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that Arizona Republican Senator John McCain has told President Obama to 'get over' Netanyahu's reelection, after many have commented that the relationship between the President and a Prime Minister was at an all-time low. Staying on U.S.-Israeli relations, *PoliticoUSA* [writes](#) Wednesday that evidence has come to light that Israel spied on Americans negotiating with Iran over that country's nuclear deal, stole classified information, and gave it to

Republicans, in order to help start a war with Iran. On Friday, *Town Hall* looks at comments this week from Republican Representative Steve King (R-IA) that he did not understand how Jewish Americans could be “be Democrats first and Jewish second and support Israel along the line of just following their president”. The comments have caused much controversy, especially among Jewish Democrats.

### Obamacare and health policy

Texas Senator Ted Cruz was not only in the news because of his Presidential announcement this week. *Daily Kos* reports on Tuesday that Cruz has become the newest customer for Obamacare – the President’s signature healthcare reform of which Cruz has been a vehement opponent – after his wife Heidi took a leave of absence from her job at Goldman Sachs to join Cruz full time on the campaign trail. On Thursday, *Freak Out Nation* writes on what happened when Republican Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rogers (WA), asked on her Facebook page for her constituents to share their Obamacare ‘horror’ stories to mark the fifth anniversary of the President signing the Affordable Care Act into law. Needless to say the responses were [not what she expected](#).

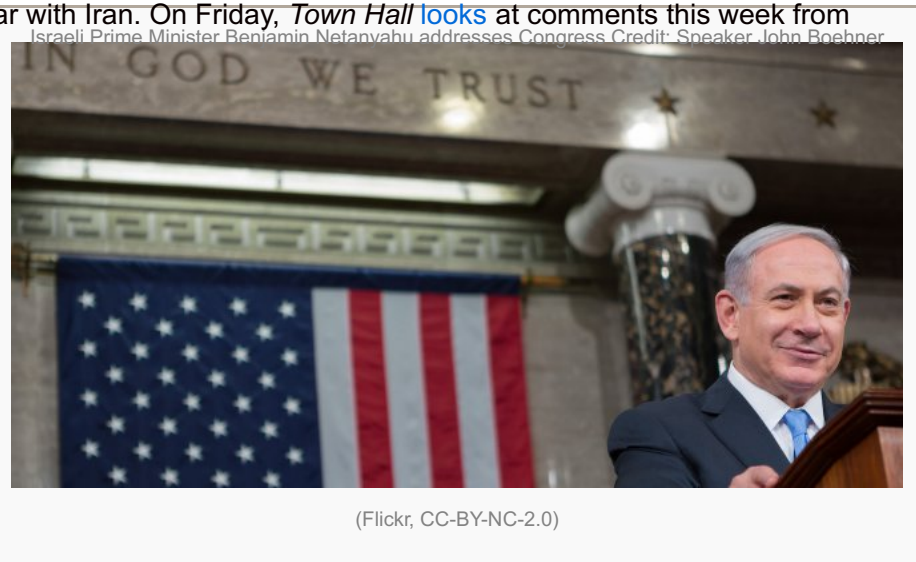
One key part of the Affordable Care Act is the expansion of Medicaid into the American states. *The Daily Signal* writes this week that expanding Medicaid will actually damage American healthcare and its citizens. They explain that Medicaid’s low reimbursement rates for doctors mean that fewer will accept Medicaid patients, meaning that patients in the future may not be able to find a doctor. *The Federalist* is similarly concerned over this week’s bipartisan agreement in Congress on the ‘doc fix’, mentioned above, which would remove the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) from Medicare’s payment system. They argue that the SGR is a formula that is supposed to control Medicare’s costs by limiting payments to physicians, but that the new agreement, which pays physicians based on the quality of care may encourage them to game the system by avoiding sicker patients. *The Atlantic* notes that the ‘doc fix’ legislation – the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act – also gives a two year extension to the Children’s Health Insurance Program, which is a major priority of the likely Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton.

### The economy and society

On Monday, *Wonkblog* looks at how much money you need to earn in order to be considered to be ‘middle class’ in every big city in America. The numbers range from \$30,000 for a family for a year in Detroit to \$103,000 in San Jose, California. This week, *The Atlantic* also has a local focus, looking at how Mayors have come to be ‘infrastructure mavens’, with many taking the lead on transportation spending after the 2009 stimulus package. They say that with only seven of the 35 biggest cities having Republican mayors (compared to the GOP’s domination of state governments), it has fallen to mayors to push for this sort of spending. Meanwhile, *Hit & Run* looks at a new survey on trust in government. Apparently despite being politically very different, people in New York and Utah trust the government about the same – not very much.

On Thursday, *The Hill’s Congress* blog says that seven states deserve an ‘F’ for their welfare programs, for not implementing simple reforms to help people move out of welfare and into jobs. They say that Georgia, Alabama, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Missouri could all do better. On Friday, *The American Prospect* has the rather depressing story that millions of women working in the U.S. still lack minimum wage and labor protections.

Do you care about climate change? Potentially not, according to new research which *The Federalist* writes on this week. They say that in 25 years of advocacy, the number of Democrats who ‘worry greatly’ about climate change has only increased by four percent, despite campaigns to promote awareness. According to them, ‘climate-change



alarmism' has failed because people don't like the Left's ideological baggage that comes with the movement.

### And finally...

For decades bloggers have been afflicted by the stereotype that they live in their parents' basement. This [week Workblog](#) is able to refute that stereotype by looking at the number of basements in America, how many bloggers there are, and how many people of bloggers' age live with their parents. It turns out that only 3.7 percent of bloggers might live in their parent's basements. But what about attics?



(Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security via Flickr CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

On Wednesday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Representative Pete Sessions' (R-TX) botched math in his latest argument against Obamacare. Sessions argued that Obamacare will cost \$5 million per person, by dividing the number of signups, 12 million, by the program's cost of \$108 billion. The answer is actually \$9,000 (though the real number is less than half of that).

Does anyone actually like filibusters? You may like them even less after reading the *Brennan Centre for Justice's* [piece](#) this week that compares them to zombies.

Featured [image](#) of Ted Cruz credit: [Gage Skidmore](#) (CC-BY-SA-2.0)

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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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