

New York's Cuomo heads to Cuba, Nebraska moves towards death penalty repeal, and Oregon's Obamacare exchange woes: US state blog round up for 18 – 24 April

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

Northeast

Daily Kos [reports](#) this week that Maine's Republican Governor, Paul LePage is pushing for harsher limits on what people can buy with food stamps, such as junk food. They say that despite Page's recent comments, Maine would still have to pass a law seeking a waiver from federal rules about what is available with food stamps.

Last week marked the second anniversary of the bombing of the Boston marathon. *The Atlantic* [argues](#) on Friday that it was wrong for Massachusetts state officials to shut the city down. They say that that present and future officials should learn from the mistake, which costs millions and caused massive disruption to the city.

This week New York Governor, Andrew Cuomo visited Cuba with a state delegation of business representatives and lawmakers. *State of Politics* [says](#) that the state's Republican Party has heavily criticized Cuomo for making the trip to what they refer to as a 'police state'. In response, Cuomo states that Cuba must change, and opening it up as a new market is a start. Staying in the Empire State, *Roll Call's At the Races* [writes](#) on Friday that Staten Island District Attorney, Dan Donovan, easily beat his Democratic opponent, Vincent Gentile, in fundraising in the last quarter ahead of the May 5th special election to replace U.S. House Representative, Michael Grimm. They say that Donovan's cash in hand is \$462,000 compared to Gentile's \$116,000.

Moving on to New Jersey, *PolitickerNJ* [reports](#) on Tuesday that GOP Governor, Chris Christie's popularity in the state is plummeting according to two new polls. They say that only a third of people now approve of Christie, and only 44 percent would describe him as 'trustworthy'.

In the Keystone State this week, *Raging Chicken Press* [says](#) that a state legislator has suggested that he will introduce legislation that will protect police officers from 'getting their feelings hurt' from citizens, and would make it a crime to taunt police. They say that the initiative is in response to the apparent change in attitudes towards police which has occurred since 9/11.



New Jersey Governor Chris Christie Credit: Gage Skidmore (CC-BY-SA-2.0)

South

On Friday, *Informed Comment* reports that this week, anger in Baltimore, Maryland is reaching a boiling point over the death of Freddie Gray, who died of a spinal injury while in the custody of the Baltimore Police Department. They [say](#) that the situation has been made worse by the Baltimore Police's statement that peaceful demonstrators were akin to a 'lynch mob'.

Florida's state House and Senate are currently locked in a battle over the expansion of Medicaid in the state. [According](#) to *Saint Peters Blog* the state House, which is against the expansion, has offered \$600 million in contingency funding to the Senate to make up for the loss of Medicaid funding.

Heading up to the Yellowhammer State, *leftinalabama* [writes](#) on Tuesday that the state's budget is a mess, and faces a huge shortfall. They say that legislators are becoming frustrated at hearing from citizens who are worried about money running out for state services, and that they should do something to fix the situation and 'quite whining'.

Wonkblog looks at the high rate of maternal mortality in Mississippi, which is the highest in the country. They [say](#) that between 2010 and 2012 nearly 40 women died for every 100,000 births, compared to the national average of 18.5. They say that the fact that the state did not expand Medicaid may be playing a contributing role.

This week marked the 20th anniversary of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, which killed 168. *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at how Oklahoma City rebounded from the largest act of homegrown terrorism in U.S. history.

Moving south to the Lone Star State, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [reports](#) that a committee in the Texas state legislature has approved a bill which would prohibit state employees from issuing or recognizing marriage licenses for same-sex couples. The move comes ahead of the Supreme Court's decision on a case which challenges state bans on gay marriages.

Midwest

The Governor of Ohio, John Kasich, looks to be preparing a bid for the Republican 2016 presidential nomination. *Americablog* [writes](#) on Friday that while Kasich is touting his credentials as a 'moderate' the Ohio General Assembly is considering his 'extreme' budget which would raise consumption taxes while slashing income taxes, which will hurt those on lower and middle incomes.

Progress Illinois [says](#) on Thursday that the state House has passed a marijuana possession bill which would see those caught with 15 grams or less of the drug fined rather than arrested. The sponsor of the bill, which is now headed to the state Senate, has said that it will ensure charges for small amounts of cannabis will not ruin people's lives.

Wednesday was Earth Day, which *Uppity Wisconsin* [say](#) was marked by Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker warning 57 staff from the state's Department of Natural Resources that they may soon be fired. Many of the staff under threat of from the Department's science division.

Crooks & Liars [reports](#) on the unfolding situation in Parma, Missouri, where the election of an African-American mayor resulted in the resignation of police officers in protest. They say on Friday that the new mayor, Betty McCray has been prevented from entering city hall, and was told that she had been impeached before she could take up her position.

On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that according to new official estimates, Kansas will be facing a \$143 million budget shortfall in 2016, after Governor Sam Brownback's overhauling of state income tax policies which saw tax breaks for wealthier Kansans. Rather than asking the wealthy to chip in to help address the shortfall, state legislators instead have barred welfare recipients from using their benefits to go swimming or watch movies, and have put forward regressive proposals to increase sales and excise taxes.

In the Cornhusker State, *Townhall* [writes](#) that the state legislature has voted to advance legislation which would repeal the death penalty. They comment that Nebraska appears to be an example of how conservatives are turning away from the death penalty, mostly because of its costs and the increasing difficulty in obtaining the

necessary drugs.

West and Pacific

This week in Colorado, *The Spot* [reports](#) that Governor John Hickenlooper has signed the state's \$25 billion into law, but has also warned of tight times ahead. They say that the Democrat has stated that spending decisions will be tougher next year because of the focus in this year's budget on increased education spending.

Heading up to the Treasure State of Montana, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [says](#) that the state's legislature has voted through a bill which would limit the use of asset forfeiture, meaning that police will no longer be able to confiscate the property of those accused, but not convicted of a crime. They say the law does have some limitations, as it does not stop state law enforcement agencies from keeping the proceeds of asset forfeitures, or working with federal agencies which would allow them to circumvent state constraints on forfeiture.

Eye on Boise [says](#) this week that Idaho is in the national news once again – this time because the state legislature's House Judiciary Committee has voted against the child support enforcement bill. The bill, which is linked to an international treaty which would make it easier to track delinquent parents, needs to be acceded to by all 50 states. Without Idaho's agreement, U.S. participation in the treaty is now in question.

On Monday, *The Hill's Congress Blog* [writes](#) that Congress should uncover the 'truth' about Cover Oregon – the state's health insurance exchange established via the Affordable Care Act. They say that Cover Oregon is a textbook example of how and why health exchanges can go wrong. They say that the exchange is now dead after Governor Kate Brown signed a bill to kill it in favor of routing people through the federal exchange of the Healthcare.gov website.

The Daily Signal is similarly negative this week about California's \$1 billion health insurance exchange. They say that Covered California is [struggling](#) with its share of challenges including disappointing enrolment numbers and problems with its call centres at launch.

Heading out to Hawaii, *Honolulu Civil Beat* [writes](#) this week that the Aloha State may about to become the first to raise the smoking age to 21, after the legislature sent a bill to Governor David Ige which would prevent those under that age from purchasing or consuming tobacco in a public place.

Featured image: Governor of New York State, Andrew Cuomo Credit: [Diana Robinson](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-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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Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker
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Colorado Governor, John Hickenlooper Credit:
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