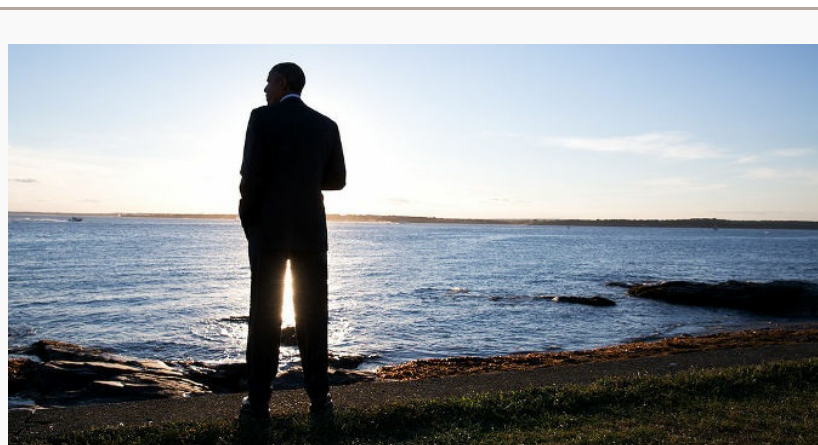


## O'Malley moves to the left, Lynch is confirmed as Attorney General, and the huge cost of gun violence: US national blog round up for 18 – 24 April

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 Tuesday this week, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that thanks to a growing economy, President Obama's approval rating of 48 percent is at its highest level since May 2013. They comment that Obama is as popular as President Ronald Reagan was at the same time in his second term. On Friday, *Townhall* [looks](#) at another poll with much more negative news for the President. They say that only 28 percent of Americans are satisfied with the country's direction, which they attribute to Obama's tenure being an 'unending rant in favor of high taxes'. President Obama



Official White House Photo by Pete Souza

has garnered a great deal of criticism from those on the right for his use of executive actions in recent months. *Crooks & Liars* [takes](#) the opposite line, praising the administration for its plans to draft new rules on who qualifies for overtime compensation. The new regulations will force more businesses to pay time and a half to people who work more than 40 hours a week.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *Roll Call's At the Races* [reports](#) on Monday that the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) raised \$10.3 million in March, \$2.1 million more than its Democratic counterpart. They say that it brings the NRCC's cash in hand to nearly \$7 million, and no debt – something which is rare for a party this early in the cycle. *Wonkblog* [uses](#) the example of Senator Marco Rubio's (R-FL) frustrated efforts to get his party to support comprehensive immigration reform to illustrate how hard it is for the Republican Party to advance policy. *Political Animal*, meanwhile [writes](#) that Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) has called fellow Republican Senators, Lindsay Graham (SC) and John McCain (AZ), 'lapdogs' for President Obama's foreign policy, in response to accusations from some members of the GOP that he is an 'isolationist'.

### Elections and the road to 2016

Looking ahead to the 2016 elections for the House of Representatives, *Roll Call's At the Races* [comments](#) on the candidates who are hoping to follow in their parent's footsteps by winning House elections. They say that there are currently 18 members who had a mother or father who served in Congress before them and that the new set of candidates are likely to take advantage of name recognition and an existing donor base.

The fact that the 2016 presidential election is more than 560 days away has not diminished the appetite for commentary and predictions on the race and its outcome. The *Monkey Cage* this week offers a very honest response to what many journalists are asking about the election – they key point being that, at this early stage, very little is certain. *Daily Kos* also weighs in on the 2016 election, writing Sunday that the election is not about the presidency. Instead, they say, it's [about the Supreme Court](#), given that the next president is likely to nominate

several new justices.

Turning to the Republican 2016 field, on Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that former Arkansas Governor, Mike Huckabee has announced that he would be making an announcement about his presidential plans in early May. They say if Huckabee does run, then he will have his work cut out for him given that other candidates such as Ted Cruz and Rand Paul will be competing for the social conservative vote.

On Monday, *Americablog* looks at another likely GOP presidential candidate, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. They [report](#) that conservative 'megadonors' Charles and David Koch have stated that they are ready to back Walker's White House bid ahead of other likely opponents. The Koch brothers are reportedly budgeting nearly \$900 million for the 2016 election cycle. Staying on Walker, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that this week he appears to have completely reversed his position on immigration policy. They comment that while two years ago, he was arguing for a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, he has now suggested that legal immigration may be depressing native-born wages.

Some commentators have suggested that Florida's Senator Marco Rubio and former Governor Jeb Bush may have an advantage in the Sunshine State if they were to gain the GOP's 2016 presidential nomination. *National Journal* [reckons](#) that neither can count on Florida, given the state's changing demographics, and the decline in importance of Cuba as a polarizing issue for voters in the state.

On Tuesday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at the position of potential Republican candidates on gay marriage. They comment that a handful of contenders, including Marco Rubio and Scott Walker, have stated that even though they oppose gay marriage, they would still attend a gay wedding. Opposition to same-sex marriage appears to be a losing fight for the GOP, especially with the Supreme Court likely to rule on the matter later this summer.

Moving on to the Democratic bench for the 2016 election, *Political Animal* this week [comments](#) on the 'draft De Blasio' movement, after a report that the Mayor of New York was positioning himself as a progressive alternative to Hillary Clinton. They say that even if the report is untrue (which it likely is), we have to wonder why anyone would consider Bill de Blasio to have a legitimate shot at the nomination given that no previous New York mayors have gained the presidency. *Hit & Run* looks at an actual likely contender for the Democratic nomination, the former Governor of Maryland, Martin O'Malley.



They write that O'Malley seems to be moving further to the left by pushing for expanded Social Security benefits, and a \$15 per hour minimum wage. They [say](#) that his strategy appears to be working, with him getting more media attention than other 'prospective anti-Clintons' such as Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and former Virginia Senator, Jim Webb.

Turning to Hillary Clinton herself, *The Federalist* [wonders](#) if Americans want to live in her 'village', marking two decades since the publication of her book, 'It Takes a Village'. They say that we now may finally get a chance to see what Clinton's 'village' will look like, and that she wishes to rule it, and that it does not have anything to do with empowering people. On Monday, *Outside the Beltway* [comments](#) that the growing questions over the influence of foreign donations to the Clinton Foundation could hurt Clinton's campaign, ahead of the publication of a book which investigates these donations.

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

On Monday, *PoliticoUSA* [reports](#) that the Supreme Court has vacated the North Carolina State Supreme Court's decision to uphold 2011 electoral maps drawn up by the Republican legislature. They say that the Supreme Court's

decision matches its ruling in a similar case concerning Alabama in March.

*The Daily Signal* this week [says](#) that a new report from the House Ways and Means Committee has found that the Internal Revenue Service deliberately cut funding for customer service. The report's GOP authors have also stated that its findings raise serious questions about the nature of the agency's budget crisis, and that it has misused \$60 million of its funding.

The big news out of the U.S. Senate this week is the confirmation of Loretta Lynch as the first African-American woman Attorney-General, after a wait of 166 days. *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) had made Lynch wait until the Senate resolved an abortion dispute in an anti-trafficking bill. *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that after railing against Lynch's nomination (citing her 'lawlessness'), Senator Ted Cruz of Texas missed the vote on her confirmation due to his attendance of a presidential fundraiser in Las Vegas.

A deal to give President Obama trade promotion authority is working its way through Congress, having cleared the Senate's Finance Committee on Wednesday. *White House Dossier* reports that Senate Minority Leader, Harry Reid, has stated that his position on the bill is not only 'No', but 'Hell no'. *Wonkblog* [points out](#) that one of the amendments proposed to the bill while it was in committee would prevent Congress from fast tracking treaties with countries that the State Department considered to be out of compliance with international standards on human trafficking. That list currently includes Malaysia, which could be problematic as it is also a party to the Trans-Pacific Partnership which is being negotiated.



On Thursday, *Americablog* [reports](#) that a cook in the Senate's cafeteria, Bertrand Olotara, has gone on strike over his \$12 an hour wage. Olotara has stated that the wage is not enough for him to support himself in Washington D.C. They say that the strike raises the question of why the U.S. government is contracting out labor to a foreign company.

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

This week *Political Animal* [presents](#) two national defense stories – the first, on the cost overruns for the Pentagon's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter project which has been plagued by software bugs and hardware problems, and the second, the recent landing of a gyrocopter by a Florida mailman protesting campaign finance on the Capitol lawn. They say that conservative politicians should be looking askance at the tremendous amount of money wasted by the Pentagon, but they actually prefer taking privileges away from those on welfare instead. Staying on military matters, *Americablog* [reports](#) that potential GOP presidential candidate; Mike Huckabee has stated that young people who are currently considering joining the military should wait until 2017, when the occupant will be friendlier towards Christians. His attitude apparently stems from the 'promotion' of gay rights in the military.

On Monday, *RedState* [says](#) that Iran is getting a \$50 billion 'signing bonus' for its recent agreement on its nuclear program, by having its assets unfrozen. They [comment](#) that the bonus is a payment for doing nothing – not even renouncing terrorism. The *Monkey Cage* also [comments](#) on the Iran deal, writing that it is a logical extension of U.S. non-proliferation policy of brokering pragmatic deals with countries to limit their nuclear programs.

President Obama [announced](#) this week that two hostages of al-Qaeda in Pakistan, one Italian and one U.S. citizen, had been accidentally killed by a U.S drone strike in January. They say that the killing shows that using drones to fight global terrorism has its limitations.

## Obamacare and health policy

On Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* [wonders](#) if Republicans have given up their fight against Obamacare. They say that while the GOP has used the Affordable Care Act to fight President Obama for the past five years, they may be recognizing the political reality that a bill repealing Obamacare would never become law as long as Barack Obama is President. Perhaps one reason that the GOP is no longer keen to repeal Obamacare is its popularity. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Tuesday that a new poll has shown that more people now favor Obamacare than are opposed to it.

The biggest challenge currently faced by Obamacare is the *King v. Burwell* case, which is currently before the Supreme Court. The case centers on the ability of federal health insurance exchanges operating at the state level to be subsidized. *The Hill's Congress Blog* [writes](#) on Monday to recommend a limited remedy to Secretary of Health and Human Services, Sylvia Matthews Burwell, to address the uncertainty caused by the case. They say that introducing rate filing flexibility (with two sets of rates that assume subsidies continue or are struck down) would help insurers to prepare rates.



Even if the Supreme Court throws out the Obamacare subsidies, Senator Ron Johnson of Wisconsin has a plan. He has introduced legislation which would maintain Obamacare's tax credits through to the end of August 2017. *Crooks & Liars* [comments](#) that the move would protect the Republican Party politically during the 2016 elections when they might otherwise be blamed by the Democrats for taking away the insurance coverage of millions. *The Atlantic* takes up this point further, writing Wednesday that the question that is likely to decide the 2016 election is 'Will you take away my health insurance?'

On Monday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at a new report which has found that just four states account for 61 percent of the four million people who are in the Medicaid gap. They say that Florida, Texas, Georgia and North Carolina have most of the people who aren't covered.

## The economy and society

On Saturday, *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) on what they say is the 'shocking' cost of gun violence – in 2012 it amounted to more than \$229 billion. They say that the cost of gun 'liberty' is more than what the Affordable Care Act costs annually and that is one of the reasons why guns should be much more carefully regulated. Staying on the topic of criminal justice, *The Atlantic* discusses this week the [increasing rarity of the death penalty](#) in America. They say that only 59 of the more than 3,100 counties in the U.S. sentenced people to be executed in 2012. They say that much of this decline is down to prosecutorial discretion and the sheer cost of death penalty cases.

*The American Prospect* has a close [look](#) at how the decline of southern white Evangelicals is related to the passage of religious freedom laws in some states. They say that changing attitudes towards same-sex marriage (which 61 percent now support [according](#) to *Outside the Beltway*) and changing demographics mean that the backlash against such laws has been greater recently than in the past.

This week also saw Comcast, the largest cable and broadband provider in the U.S., announce that it was abandoning its planned merger with Time Warner, after the Federal Communications Commission told the company that it would 'not help consumers'. *The Atlantic* [says](#) that the news is welcome for many who were concerned that it would create a real lack of competition at the national level.

**And finally...**

*FreakOutNation* [reports](#) on the final request of Larry Upright, a North Carolina Republican in his obituary: don't vote for Hillary Clinton.

Are politics in America still fun? Occasionally, [says](#) *Political Animal*.

*The Atlantic* [has](#) an in-depth look at Hillary Clinton's campaign logo, and how it compares to those of other presidential candidates.

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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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