

Same-sex marriage at the Supreme Court, Japan's Abe addresses Congress, and Jeb Bush's fundraising power: US national blog round up for 25 April – 1 May

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

Saturday saw the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner, where the President traditionally mocks himself and others in politics. *PoliticusUSA* [lists](#) President Obama's five best jokes, including:

And that's not all people say about me. A few weeks ago, Dick Cheney says he thinks I'm the worst President of his lifetime. Which is interesting, because I think Dick Cheney is the worst President of my lifetime. It's quite a coincidence.

On Sunday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at President Obama's recent statements on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement between the U.S. and other Pacific nations, which is currently under negotiation. They say that Obama is pushing back against others in his party and other progressives who oppose the deal, and that while he has stated that he wants a trade deal that works for Americans, with strong labor standards and environmental protections, the TPP does not do this. *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) on a similar theme this week, saying that Obama has made some bad deals, and should stop sidelining Congress. They cite examples such as the recent agreement with Iran over its nuclear program and the trade of five terrorists for the release of Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl last year, as deals where Congress should have – and had a right to be – consulted.

Moving to the Democratic Party more generally, *Americablog* [writes](#) Monday that Senator Kirsten Gillibrand has announced a new bill which would require the 25 states that have not already implemented online voter registration to do so. They say that if the bill passes, it would expand online voter registration to around 100 million Americans who do not yet have access to it. This week also saw riots and unrest in Baltimore following the death last week of Freddie Gray while in police custody. *Roll Call's Heard on the Hill* [writes](#) Thursday that Baltimore Congressman Elijah E. Cummings (MA) has had a 'Rudy' moment (referring to the actions of New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks) this week when he used a bullhorn to clear crowds on the streets while ignoring a Fox News reporter.

On the GOP side, *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee headed by Congressman Steve King (R-IA) has raised the possibility of ending the practice of granting citizenship to all children born in the U.S., arguing that such birthright citizenship incentivises unauthorized immigration and 'birth tourism'.

Elections and the road to 2016

Looking ahead to the 2016 House elections *Roll Call's Rothenblog* writes that the playing field is too small for the Democrats to be able to retake the majority, but that this cycle is time for the party to grow its base of candidates. They [say](#) that the party needs to gain 30 seats, and that 31 districts are competitive, 23 of which are GOP-held.

Moving on to the Republican's still-large field of potential 2016 presidential candidates, *Daily Kos* [says](#) that the current Governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal has written a New York Times op-ed which criticizes the business community for bringing pressure against state governments in Indiana and Arkansas over their religious freedom

laws. They comment that Jindal is wrong about how people should be able to exercise religious freedom, and that it should end where it begins to affect other people's freedom and rights.

Wonkblog, meanwhile, [reports](#) that the former Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, looks set to raise \$100 million, via his Right to Rise political action committee, by the end of May as part of the lead-in to his likely presidential campaign.

On Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* gives an [update](#) on polling and survey data for the various Republican presidential candidates – declared and undeclared. They report that Florida Senator Marco Rubio has



pulled ahead in the rankings over Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, something which they ascribe to his candidacy announcement last week. *RedState* meanwhile suggests this week that the economy could sink sitting governors like Walker, Jindal, and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie in the 2016 race. They [say](#) that if the U.S. slips into recession before January 2016, these governors will share the blame with President Obama for job losses, and will also likely leave their offices with their state's finances in a dire condition.

Moving on to the Democratic side of the unfolding 2016 campaign, *The Federalist* [writes](#) Monday that former Virginia Senator Jim Webb could win as a 'Reagan Democrat', challenging the likely nominee, Hillary Clinton, from the right, and would therefore be a formidable opponent for Republicans. They say that unfortunately for Webb, his position on the right of the party essentially guarantees that he will not be the nominee.

Former Maryland Governor and mayor of Baltimore, Martin O'Malley cut short a European speaking trip this week in order to travel to Baltimore, which saw riots early in the week. *Hit & Run* [comments](#) that O'Malley, who may well be considering a presidential run, has a 'lousy' record on overpolicing as Mayor of Baltimore with a dubious record of locking up African Americans for relatively minor offenses.

The big news on the Democratic front this week was Vermont Independent Senator Bernie Sanders' announcement that he would be running for the Democratic presidential nomination. *Roll Call's At the Races* [says](#) that Sanders – a self-identified socialist – is a long shot for the nomination against Hillary Clinton, but stated that he is 'in this race to win', with a focus on making the economy work for people rather than the super-rich.

Moving on to Hillary Clinton, *Hit & Run* [looks](#) at the winners and losers from the unfolding scandal over donations and 'influence-peddling' between her role as Secretary of State, and the Clinton Global Initiative. They say that the winners are likely to be her Democratic challengers, like Jim Webb, and that the losers are the American people, who are likely to have their confidence in federal government eroded even more. *The Lonely Conservative* also makes a [point](#) about Clinton's lack of transparency, writing that she has only answered seven media questions during her campaign thus far. On Wednesday morning, Clinton made a significant speech which called for reforms of policing and the current policies of mass incarceration. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that with its focus on economic inequality as well, her speech showed the Clinton that they want to see more of as the campaign continues.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

The Supreme Court was in session this week, and on Tuesday oral arguments began in an important case which has the potential to make same-sex marriage legal across the states. *FiveThirtyEight* comments that despite its power, the Supreme Court lacks transparency, with no photos or videos of oral arguments available. They [discuss](#) a new model that can predict Supreme Court decisions based on oral arguments alone. After the opening arguments on Tuesday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that the Supreme Court is split along traditional party

lines, and that Justice Anthony Kennedy will likely cast the deciding vote in the case.

On Thursday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at the Supreme Court's decision to uphold a state legal ethics rule which bars candidates for judicial office from directly asking for campaign contributions. They say that the decision is a narrow and limited win for campaign-finance reform in that it does not restrict private donations as a funding source in judicial elections – it just means that candidates are unable to directly ask for them.

On Sunday, *Daily Kos* gives [five ways that the Drug Enforcement Agency is redundant](#), writing that it is the legacy of Richard Nixon, who established it as part of his war on crime. Two reasons they cite are that U.S. jails are already full, and that the National Security Agency already spies on Americans.

With the recent bipartisan agreement on Medicare reimbursements to physicians (the so called 'doc-fix'), many commentators have wondered if Congress might be moving into a period of greater bipartisanship. *Roll Call's Hawkings Here* [warns](#) us not to get our hopes up, given the partisan battles ahead such as the coming clash over the sequester spending caps. One immediate example of this is the intent, [reported](#) by *Daily Kos*, of Congressional Republicans including Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) and members of the House Freedom Caucus to stop a law which would protect workers in Washington D.C from being fired for having abortions or advocating pro-choice positions.

The Daily Signal reports this week that negotiators from the House and Senate reached agreement on the 2016 budget, which, if it passes, will be the first time a budget has been passed by Congress in five years. They [write](#) that the budget achieves balance in 2024 and would repeal Obamacare using the reconciliation process, which allows Congress to pass legislation in the Senate without being subjected to a filibuster.

Just what can Congress do to prevent incidents like the death of Freddie Gray in police custody in Baltimore? *National Journal* [writes](#) Tuesday that there is little Congress seems to be able to do to combat police brutality – the reaction to previous events has tended to be composed of hearings and task forces which seldom seem to make any difference.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

This week *The Atlantic* gives a [skeptic's guide](#) to the recent deal between Iran and the United Nations' P5+1 over that country's nuclear program. They say that Congress has missed an opportunity to help the Obama administration to help it to win a tougher deal with Iran, and that there are concerns as to what Iran may do with its newfound wealth which will come as sanctions are ended. *The Democratic Truth* meanwhile [reports](#) that House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) has stated that Congress does not have enough votes to veto the Iran deal. On Thursday, *RedState* [writes](#) that Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) and Marco Rubio (R-FL) are on the verge of 'scuttling' via amendments Senator Bob Corker's (R-TN) bill which would allow Congress to review the nuclear deal with Iran. They say that Cotton and Rubio's amendments would require Iran recognize Israel's statehood, and allow for the inspection of suspicious sites.

Republican Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky has developed a reputation as something of a foreign policy non-interventionist. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on his comments this week that overthrowing Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein



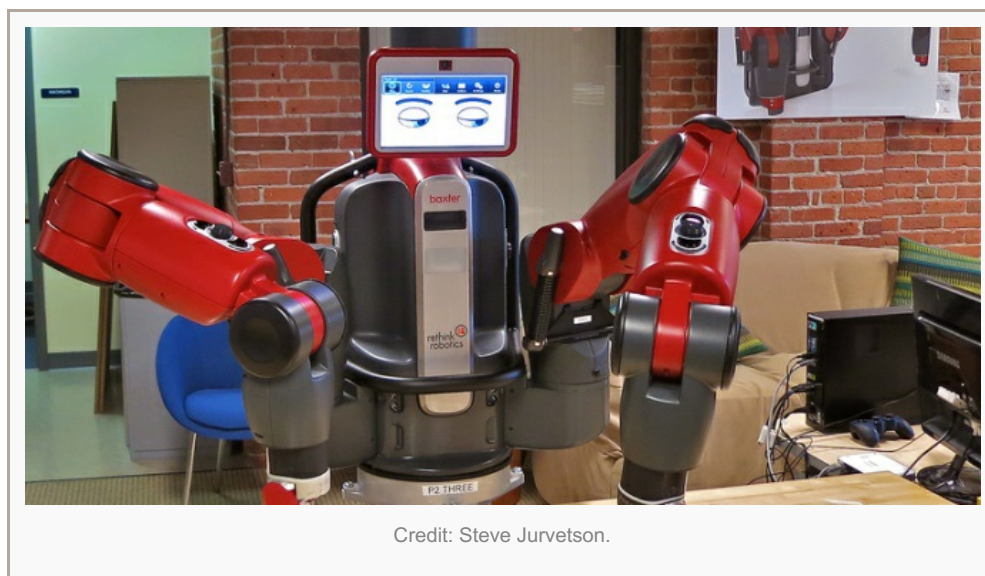
was a 'mistake', something that they say is unlikely to play well with his party's far-right base.

On Thursday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) on Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's address to a joint session of Congress this week, the first Japanese Prime Minister to do so. They say that Prime Minister Abe emphasized the strong relationship between the U.S. and Japan, and push for the completion of the Trans-Pacific trade agreement.

Obamacare and health policy

Prior to the launch of the Affordable Care Act, many commentators predicted a 'death-spiral' whereby few people would sign up for health insurance under the scheme, which would in turn lead to soaring premiums. *Paul Krugman* [reminds](#) us of these predictions and comments that Obamacare enrollments are growing more or less in line with supporters' projections. On Monday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on a new survey that has found that customers of Obamacare are happier with their plans than other insured people – satisfaction levels are 17 points higher compared to employer-based insurance. Many states have set up their own Obamacare health insurance exchanges, whose set-up costs were covered by federal funding. *Hit & Run* writes this week that now that most of that federal funding has now run out, some states may be using federal funding they hold in reserve to cover projected shortfalls. They [say](#) that this is not only unsustainable, it may also be illegal given the Affordable Care Act's mandate that state-run health insurance exchanges should have been self-funding from the start of 2015.

The economy and society



Credit: Steve Jurvetson.

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [takes](#) an in-depth look at the role of technology and employment. They say that the major issue may not be robots and other technological innovations replacing humans, but that businesses are not able to hire enough people with the necessary skills to deal with the new technology.

This week first quarter growth figures were released – a disappointing (and unexpected) 0.2 percent. Ahead of the release *Wonkblog* [says](#) that we should be sceptical of those, including economists, who blame the results on the weather, as the tie between poor economic performance and weather conditions is often overstated. In light of the results, *American Thinker* [looks](#) at why U.S. GDP has 'stalled' – they explain that the energy boom caused a short term slump in capital spending, as well as an increasing dollar are contributing factors.

The New Yorker uses the riots and unrest in Baltimore this week to [discuss](#) the state of American cities, and comment that the death of Freddie Gray is part of a tableau "in which the dateline seems increasingly incidental", given the frequency that black men are killed by police across the country. *Crooks & Liars* [argues](#) that the violence in Baltimore illustrates why a good jobs policy is overdue as well as higher minimum wages.

On Thursday, *The Brennan Center for Justice* [writes](#) on how driver's licence suspensions for the failure to pay court-imposed debt forces people into a web of debt and debt collection which they find hard to escape. They say that in California alone, there is more than \$10 billion in uncollected, court-ordered debt.

And finally...

Don't like tourists? *Wonkblog* has a [map](#) with the most 'local' neighborhoods in 16 major U.S. cities.

Remember freedom fries? Well, they're back, at least in a new proposal from Texas' Agriculture Commissioner, Sid Miller, [writes](#) *FreakOutNation*.

National Journal has collected [15 presidential campaign ads](#) from the past, all for your viewing pleasure.

Featured [image](#): Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addresses a joint session of Congress Credit: [Speaker John Boehner](#) ([Flickr](#), [CC-BY-NC-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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