

Dark money influencing Arkansas' Supreme Court race, North Dakota's competing marijuana ballot measures, and New Mexico's profitable prisons: US state blog roundup for 6 – 12 February

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

Northeast

In New Hampshire this week, *Granite Grok* [argues](#) that for every vote made from out of state, a New Hampshire citizen loses theirs. Even though federal law prohibits interstate voting, Granite State elected officials and party activists have been encouraging students and campaign workers who are out of state to vote.

Heading south, *Capitol Confidential* [says](#) that US Representative Chris Gibson (R) is sounding like a fully-fledged gubernatorial candidate for the Empire State. This week saw Gibson outline a four point approach that he thinks could win in 2018 which includes returning education policy to the local level, rethinking gun control, tax cuts, and top-down ethics reforms in the state's legislature.

RIPR [argues](#) Friday that it's now time for Rhode Island to legalize marijuana. They argue that the war on drugs has been a failure, and that taxing pot could provide revenue to fix the Ocean State's crumbling schools.

Moving on to New Jersey, *PolitickerNJ* [writes](#) that the President of the State Senate, Steve Sweeney (D) has proposed a bill which would amend the state's constitution to introduce incremental increases in the minimum wage topping out at \$15 by 2024. They say that the bill competes with one from Assembly Speaker Vince Prieto to do the same, and could help support for Sweeney to gain his party's nomination for the 2017 gubernatorial election. Staying in the Garden State, *Save Jersey* [says](#) that Democrats in Trenton have wasted no time bashing Governor Chris Christie who has come home having given up on his presidential bid.

PoliticsPA has an interesting [map](#) of the partisan makeup of the Keystone State. They say that while central and western Pennsylvania are deep red, the eastern part of the state is generally blue as is the 'Acela corridor' which links Philadelphia with New York.

South

Delaware Liberal [says](#) they should be celebrating given that the state Senate last week passed a bill which would increase the state's minimum wage to \$10.50 an hour, but any sense of celebration is tempered by the fact that the increase will be incremental over five years.



Maryland Governor Larry Hogan Credit: Maryland GovPics (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

Moving west, *Political Maryland* [comments](#) though while Governor Larry Hogan's recent State of the State address lacked flair and imagination it did have the right theme – conciliation and compromise. They despite his stated concerns about the state's increasing borrowing costs, there was little in his budget to actually rein in spending.

North Carolina was in the news this week after its Supreme Court denied a request by challengers of the state's 2011 voting maps for a new hearing of the Court's December opinion which upheld the maps for a second time. *NC Policy Watch* [writes](#) that the ruling puts the state court challenge back on a US Supreme Court path.

Florida's *Saint Peters Blog* [says](#) that the state's legislature is divided over the budget and tax cuts. The current session ends on March 11, and the state Senate and House must compromise over the \$1 billion that separates their rival spending plans.

On Thursday, *Arkansas Blog* [writes](#) that a 'dark money' group from outside of the state has launched TV and mail ads against Associate Supreme Court Justice Courtney Goodson who is running for the state's chief justice office in March. They comment that Goodson's opponent in the race, Circuit Judge, Dan Kemp, has 'sorta' distanced himself from the campaign but has stated that he thinks that the ads raise legitimate questions about the gifts Goodson has publically accepted.

Friday sees *The Okie* [report](#) on the state of prisons in the Sooner State. They comment that the new Interim Department of Corrections Director, Joe Allibaugh has already stated that the state's prison system is dangerously antiquated, and that major changes are needed.

Midwest

Eclētablog has the [news](#) on Friday that Bryan Mielke is running for a second time for a seat in Michigan's 99th House District. Why does this matter? Well the state GOP has just put up Roger Hauck to oppose Mielke in the 99th – but it turns out that Hauck made his announcement in a pizza restaurant in the neighboring 98th district.

Moving over to Illinois, *Capitol Fax* has the [news](#) that a federal judge has ordered the state government to make payments to continue health care access to hundreds of thousands of families and to support the providers who provide such care. The state's ongoing budget crisis means that many of these providers have not been paid since June 2015.

In Wisconsin, *The Political Environment* [writes](#) Tuesday that the state's legislature has stuck it to the general public once again by allowing property owners to keep more of their land closed to the public after opening managed land

to hiking or hunting in order to gain a tax break.

South Dakota's *Dakota Free Press* [says](#) that the state Governor Dennis Daugaard's half-penny sales tax increase which is to pay for teachers' pay increases, would still leave the state reliant on the federal government for K-12 funding.

Heading north, *The Prairie Blog* [reports](#) that new federal data shows that North Dakota is one of the worst performing states in terms of its economy. Staying in the Peace Garden State, *Say Anything blog* [comments](#) that North Dakota may have competing ballot measures to legalize marijuana: one for medicinal use, and another which would fully legalize its production and possession.

West and Pacific

Progressnow NM [says](#) that New Mexico has posted record prison profits – more than \$109,000 for 2014 – and that state Republicans are fast tracking bills which would increase prison funding and send more New Mexicans to prison using money from other parts of the state's budget.



Credit: Ken Teegardin (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Montana Cowgirl Blog writes this [week](#) that gubernatorial hopeful has fumbled a Super Bowl email appeal by using a picture of lacrosse players in a football-themed message.

Eye on Boise [reports](#) that Idaho's prison population has fallen so low, it will bring back 173 of its inmates who are now being housed in a private prison in Colorado. The state's prison population has fallen from 8,200 to 7,800, meaning that state prisons have been able to give back \$1.2 million to the state's general fund.

Moving south, *Oregon Catalyst* [says](#) that the state's short session is dominated by the Democrats' one-party authoritarian regime, with pre-determined outcomes and the bills that are allowed a floor vote sure to pass.

Heading further south to California, *Fox & Hounds* [writes](#) that the Southern Californian Gas Company and the City Of Los Angeles' agreement that residents displaced by the Porter Ranch gas leak must return after eight days (or lose their relocation expense reimbursements) is unacceptable. The gas leak began in late October, and has disrupted thousands of families since then, who have had to relocate. Staying in the Golden State, *Flashreport* [says](#) that Governor Jerry Brown is holding road and highway projects hostage until he gets votes on his tax packages.

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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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