

March 12, 2014

**John Fund** says counter Putin with natural gas exports.

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**Christopher Helman** in Forbes says even the NY Times understands the opportunity our oil and gas boom has become. Will president 'pipeline dither' figure it out?

*The hand-wringing over what to do to help Ukraine has had a very positive impact on the U.S. oil and gas industry. Politicians like Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) are seizing on the crisis to call for a lifting of the ban on U.S. oil exports — the better to counterbalance Russia's petro-influence. While the Wall Street Journal this morning wrote that western politicians are working on a variety of options to help "loosen Russia's energy stranglehold on Ukraine" including "larger exports of U.S.-made natural gas."*

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We think we have stultifying bureaucrats? Walter Russell Mead says regulations are killing fracking in the UK.

*The mood is downright gloomy at the Shale UK conference this week, where various stakeholders in the country's fledgling industry are bemoaning a lack of progress in tapping the countries estimated 1.3 quadrillion cubic feet of natural gas trapped in shale. Despite having some of the thicker—and therefore easier to drill—shale in Europe, faulted stratigraphy, stunted support infrastructure, and a byzantine regulatory environment are preventing Britain from imitating America's shale success. The FT reports:*

*Exploration is expensive and it is easy to spend more on drilling a well than the value of gas that comes out of the ground. Drilling costs are significantly higher in the UK than the US. The nascent supply chain and long licensing process are largely to blame.*

*"It's a lot slower than in the US," says Francis Egan, Cuadrilla chief executive. "We have to apply for eight or nine permits for each exploration well." ...*

Ron Fournier, certified member of the left media, posts on Diane Feinstein's accusations of CIA congress spying.

*They spied on you. They lied to the Senate. They seized telephone records from the Associated Press and considered criminalizing investigative journalism at Fox News. What else can the U.S. intelligence community do to destroy its credibility, curb civil liberties, and ultimately undermine U.S. security?*

*Spy on Congress.*

*Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a Democrat bravely challenging a Democratic White House, accused the CIA of searching computer files used by her staffers on the Senate Intelligence Committee to review the CIA's now-defunct interrogation programs, ...*

Peggy Noonan posts on Feinstein in her blog.

*Here again is the problem of surveillance professionals operating within a highly technologized surveillance state: If they can do it they will do it. If they are able to take an action they will sooner or later take it, whether or not it's a good thing, even whether or not it is legal. Defenders of the surveillance state as it is currently organized and constituted blithely argue that laws, rules, traditions and long-held assumptions will control or put a damper on the actions of those with the power to invade the privacy of groups or individuals. They are very trusting people! But they are wrong. You cannot know human nature (or the nature and imperatives of human organizations) and assume people will refrain from using the power at hand to gain advantage. And so we have to approach surveillance state issues not from a framework of "it's OK, we can trust our government" but "it's not going to be OK, government agencies give us new reasons each day to doubt their probity, judgment and determination to adhere to the law." ...*

In an article more appropriate for yesterday's discourse on Russia, [David Harsanyi](#) says Russians get the government they want.

*... the more Putin undermines liberal institutions the more popular he becomes. The people who vote for the presidents of Russia and the United States view are unrelated, emerging from distinct historical, moral and ideological perspectives. So expecting people — even people given a vote — to act in what we consider a logical manner, is a waste of time. While we, for example, may be confused about the harsh fate of Pussy Riot!, [only 5 percent of Russians](#) believed that the punk/activist band didn't deserve serious penalties for its actions. Actually, 29 percent believed that the band should have been sent into forced labor, while 37 percent believe they should be imprisoned.*

*So the Russian government controls the country's three main television channels, and at the end of 2013, Putin replaced the national news agency with a new and more compliant version. This undermines the free press, of course, but the ugly fact is there doesn't seem to be much anger about it. In recent years, the Kremlin has imposed limits on protests, criminalized libel, and censored political material on the internet. It has banned the work of nongovernmental organizations (typically aimed at fostering more transparency in government), frozen the assets of human rights groups that receive funding from U.S. citizens, and jailed the political opposition. Occasionally a dissident dies of poisoning.*

*But the reversal of once promising liberal reforms in Russia is not the result of an undermining of democracy. It happened with the full consent of the electorate. In Russia's first presidential election, in 2000, Vladimir Putin, who had previously been made prime minister, won 53 percent of the vote. In 2004, he won 71 percent of the vote. In 2008, his lackey Dmitry Medvedev also won in a landslide. In 2012, Putin returned to the presidency in a landslide election with a parliament dominated by members of his party, giving him virtually one party rule.*

*Sadder still, Putin may be a better choice. ...*

**[Paul Mirengoff](#)** posts on the GOP win in FL.

*Republican Dave Jolly has defeated Democrat Alex Sink in the special congressional election in FLA-13. The margin was 48.5 to 46.5.*

*This was a closely watched election in which the Democrats invested lots of money and effort (Jolly was significantly outspent) and recruited a prominent candidate — their former nominee for Governor. Although the seat has been held for years by a popular Republican, Obama carried the district in 2012, albeit very narrowly, as did Sink herself in her 2010 run for governor. I discussed the numerous advantages Sink possessed in [this post](#).*

*The race will be viewed by Republican operatives as a harbinger of things to come in this cycle. That view doesn't seem like too much of a stretch. Sink will not be the last Democrat who sinks under the weight of Obamacare.*

*UPDATE: Dave Wasserman, the editor of the non-partisan Cook Political Report and certainly not a Republican operative, says "If Dems couldn't win an Obama congressional district with a solid candidate against a flawed R, expect a rough November."*

Jennifer Rubin has more.

*David Jolly eked out a win with less than 50 percent of the vote over now two-time election loser Alex Sink in a special election for Florida's 13th Congressional District. We should not make more of it than there is, but here are some specifics regarding this election:*

- *Obamacare played a huge part in the race; Democrats who think it won't be the primary issue in November may be deluding themselves. (And, unlike the Democratic incumbents who will be on the ballot, Sink didn't vote for Obamacare.)*
- *American Crossroads spent \$500,000 on Jolly's behalf. American Action Network also spent \$500,000. Another mainstream group YG Network spent six figures as well. Tea party groups did little, if anything. Perhaps they aren't much help in the trenches.*
- *That said, the money came out about even when all third-party activity was counted. Neither side left the candidate to fend for himself or herself. ...*

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## National Review

### Counter Putin with Natural-Gas Exports

***Obama should ignore the green lobby and expedite exports to Europe.***

by John Fund

Post-Crimea, everyone suddenly recognizes that Russia is a potential geopolitical menace to the West.

But for years the Obama administration has completely failed to use the U.S.'s boom in energy production to increase its security and that of its European allies. Frustrated members of Congress from both parties now want to force the White House to stop delaying a full two dozen permits for the export of America's abundant natural gas.

Ukraine depends on Russia for more than two-thirds of its natural gas, and Russia is already raising prices steeply. Thirty-four percent of Europe's gas came from Russia last year. Indeed, it was in part Ukraine's reliance on Russian energy that pushed now-deposed Ukraine president Viktor Yanukovich to abandon a scheduled trade deal with the European Union in favor of discount natural-gas prices from Russia, among other inducements from Putin. That turnaround led to the street protests that toppled Yanukovich last month.

So far the administration, under pressure from its environmental allies, is exhibiting no sense of urgency on an issue that should be a no-brainer. "Its slow-walking of liquefied natural-gas plant permits is of a piece with its failure to approve the Keystone pipeline and get new trade deals done," says James Lucier, an energy analyst with Capital Alpha Partners in Washington. "It's all a sign of just how disengaged from the rest of the world the Obama folks have become."

In an effort to push the Obama folks into dealing with global realities, the House Foreign Affairs Committee last Thursday unanimously passed a resolution that condemns Russia's intervention in Ukraine and supports taking steps to reduce Russia's control of energy and allow more natural-gas exports. Chairman Ed Royce, a California Republican, told me: "With Russia's economy so dependent on oil and gas sales and with the U.S. increasingly abundant in energy, it makes no sense not to include energy in our 'soft power' response to Russia's aggression." The full House will vote on the resolution on Tuesday. Speed is important; this week Russia announced it was already raising prices on the vital natural gas it sends to Ukraine, pushback for the new government's orientation to the West.

Paul Bledsoe, a former Clinton White House aide, and Lee Feinstein, a former Obama-administration ambassador to Poland, told Reuters last week that "natural gas from the U.S. will not eliminate Russian leverage, but together with substantial supplies already on the market and other sources from Qatar and Norway, it could reduce Russia's stranglehold on European energy requirements." Several Democratic senators, including Mark Udall of Colorado and Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, agree and have joined legislation to accelerate the permitting process. "The moment is in front of us," Senator Mark Begich, a Democrat from Alaska, told reporters last week: "We should take advantage of this and use it as an international tool that could help create allies but also help make sure Russia isn't just running amok out there."

Many members of Congress want the administration to follow through on President Obama's oft-repeated campaign pledge that America will pursue an "all of the above" energy strategy. The steps to make good on this promise are easy, many believe, and they are frustrated that Obama so far remains unmoved. "The president doesn't need legislation from Congress to make these changes, from approving Keystone to ending the embargo on energy development on federal lands to natural-gas exports," House Speaker John Boehner told a group last Friday. That same day, the *Wall Street Journal* published an appeal Boehner wrote to President Obama, in which he urged, "This is something the President could do right now in the face of Putin's aggression."

The White House, however, feels no sense of urgency. White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Friday that because Europe has had a relatively mild winter, gas supplies are at or above normal levels. The environmental groups behind Obama also piously claim that nothing can be done. No matter what President Obama might order, they note, no new natural-gas-export terminals could be finished before next year. But Obama's delays, which have cost us precious time, are no excuse to keep doing the wrong thing.

Green groups also note that natural-gas deposits are often exploited through "fracking," the procedure by which fluid is injected into cracks in rocks to force them open, allowing more oil and gas to flow out. Despite numerous scientific studies that find no environmental harm from the process, green advocates view fracking as dangerous both in itself and because it encourages increased use of the fossil fuels they despise.

Marita Noon, executive director of Energy Makes America Great Inc., adds: "Environmental groups who are pushing to ban fracking will put the U.S. in much the same place Ukraine finds itself in — beholden to unfriendly forces who can use energy to control us. Most people do not realize that more than 96 percent of the oil and natural-gas wells within our borders are developed using hydraulic fracturing."

The Obama administration faces a critical choice: It can continue to appease its environmental allies, or it can accept the new reality that the U.S. must use its energy resources to help check

Putin's aggression. Here's hoping the administration listens to the voices of Democrats who recognize the importance of countering Russian aggression regardless of what sanctions are imposed. As Bill Richardson, who was energy secretary under President Clinton, put it: "What we are offering the international community and our friends by exporting natural gas is a form of energy security."

So far, Obama has given nothing more than empty words to America's energy producers and allies. It is perhaps telling that when Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic sent a letter late last week urging the U.S. to step up efforts to export natural gas, it was addressed to House Speaker John Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. These countries have no doubt made private appeals to the White House, but the Europeans aren't waiting for President Dither to make up his mind.

## **Forbes**

### **[The Ukraine Crisis Is Bolstering America's Oil And Gas Boom](#)**

by Christopher Helman

The hand-wringing over what to do to help Ukraine has had a very positive impact on the U.S. oil and gas industry. Politicians like Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) are seizing on the crisis to call for a lifting of the ban on U.S. oil exports — the better to counterbalance Russia's petro-influence. While the Wall Street Journal this morning wrote that western politicians are working on a variety of options to help "loosen Russia's energy stranglehold on Ukraine" including "larger exports of U.S.-made natural gas."

Nevermind that the U.S. currently exports no natural gas in the form of LNG because new liquefaction plants won't be completed until late 2015. The bigger point was made by economist Ed Yardeni in his morning note today: "By invading Crimea, Russian President Vladimir Putin may have succeeded in resolving the debate in the U.S. about whether or not we should export natural gas and crude oil."

Yardeni noted this New York Times editorial over the weekend as proof positive that the Obama administration (and the rest of the left-leaning side of the political class) now embraces U.S. energy exports as a potentially powerful political tool. When even the New York Times editorial board defies the anti-fracking lobby to conclude that "natural gas exports could serve American foreign-policy interests in Europe" it indicates that LNG exports are something we can all agree on.

And get this, another Times story reveals that Hillary Rodham Clinton has for years been in favor of "channeling the domestic energy boom into a geopolitical tool to advance American interests around the world." The former Secretary of State supposedly set up an 85-person bureau at the State Department in 2011, for the purpose of doing just that.

Naturally we haven't heard about it until now. Because if Clinton were to voice support for using America's energy riches as a geopolitical policy tool, that would be tantamount to stamping her seal of approval on fracking. We all know how much Hillary's base on the left disapproves of fracking, but the simple truth is: there can be no natural gas boom without it.

With the tea leaves showing administration approval of the pipeline to be all but inevitable, it makes sense that Clinton will want to show that she's long been in favor of Keystone. It's the State Department as well that plays the point on the approvals process for cross-border pipelines like the Keystone XL. Now that the Ukraine situation has made it politically expedient, both President Obama and Clinton can finally get behind the approval of the Keystone pipeline under the cover of strengthening America's energy infrastructure the better to deal with Putin's thuggery. As a WSJ editorial stated a few days ago, "An added benefit is that by disappointing his climate-obsessed financiers, Mr. Obama might restore some of his international credibility."

This will have very meaningful implications for the next presidential race. If Hillary is now trotting out this State Department energy bureau as proof of her support of America's energy might, then she can't possibly campaign for president as being anti-fracking. Nor could she legitimately get away with the left's knee-jerk demonization of the oil and gas industry.

So let the boom times continue!

Indeed, there's no reason why America's energy boom shouldn't receive bi-partisan support. In eight years the industry has boosted natural gas output by 36% to nearly 26 trillion cubic feet per year. And in just three years oil production is up 45%, to 8 million barrels per day. This growth has created more than 1 million jobs and fed tens of billions of dollars in royalties into state and federal coffers.

Yet the extension of America's energy might as a political tool could have enormous implications for the likes of ExxonMobil. As politicians get serious about dissuading Putin's aggression, we could well see a sanctions package forcing Exxon to put its Russian projects on hold.

Through a joint venture with Kremlin-controlled [Rosneft Rosneft](#), Exxon is working to export the fracking and drilling technology perfected in the United States over to Russia, where the companies are set to explore the shale oil potential of the Bahzenov, a shale layer thought to have similar characteristics to the Bakken of North Dakota, but more than 10 times bigger. Exxon has some 11 million acres its exploring with Rosneft across Russia. Just last week Exxon execs [said](#) they would not move ahead with a gas project in Ukraine.

Blocking investment in Russia wouldn't be good for Exxon shareholders, but in the long run it would likely help lengthen America's oil and gas boom — creating that much more incentive for the likes of Exxon to invest at home rather than abroad, and work to deepen the heft of America's energy influence.

## **American Interest**

### **[Running on Empty](#)**

#### ***UK Shale Struggles a Reminder of Why America Succeeded***

by Walter Russell Mead

The mood is downright gloomy at the Shale UK conference this week, where various stakeholders in the country's fledgling industry are bemoaning a lack of progress in tapping the countries [estimated](#) 1.3 quadrillion cubic feet of natural gas trapped in shale. Despite having some of the thicker—and therefore easier to drill—shale in Europe, faulted stratigraphy, stunted support



infrastructure, and a byzantine regulatory environment are preventing Britain from imitating America's shale success. The [FT reports](#):

Exploration is expensive and it is easy to spend more on drilling a well than the value of gas that comes out of the ground. Drilling costs are significantly higher in the UK than the US. The nascent supply chain and long licensing process are largely to blame.

"It's a lot slower than in the US," says Francis Egan, Cuadrilla chief executive. "We have to apply for eight or nine permits for each exploration well."

Geology is another factor. While UK shale gas reserves appear to be thicker than those in the US, the UK's geological make-up is likely to prove more challenging. "The UK is highly faulted by comparison to a typical North American shale area like Marcellus or Eagle Ford," says Joe Cartwright, Shell Professor of Earth Sciences at Oxford university. "Our areas are intrinsically more complex."

America remains the sole state to capitalize on its shale oil and gas resources, and difficulties in countries like the UK and China remind us that the shale revolution was more than just the result of applying the dual techniques of hydraulic fracturing and horizontal well drilling to underground hydrocarbon reservoirs. Rather, the US energy revolution was the product of a mature oil and gas drilling industry, replete with robust supply chains. The boom depended on a unique set of mineral rights that provided landowners with a financial incentive to invite drillers on to their land, on a deep pool of capital, and on a variety of small wildcatting firms willing to take on the risk of drilling exploratory wells. And it couldn't have happened without a bit of [natural providence](#): US shale is neatly layered, like a "[wedding cake](#)," making it easier to drill the requisite horizontal wells, and drillers weren't hampered by water scarcity the way their Chinese counterparts [have been](#).

This isn't to say that shale can't be tapped elsewhere, just that it's going to be a more difficult process than many world leaders not named Obama might like. But the race to produce even a pale imitation of America's experience is more important to European energy security now than ever, given the situation in Ukraine. Europe sources nearly a third of its natural gas from Russia, and that's a lever Brussels is keen to rid itself of as it maneuvers against Moscow. Lawmakers in Washington have [made the case](#) that American LNG could help on that front, but so too could the continent's [significant](#) domestic supply of shale gas. The Crimean crisis may be the strongest incentive yet for Europe to frack.

## National Journal

### [What Else Can the Obama Administration Do to Undermine U.S. Security?](#)

*After the administration spied on Americans and lied to Congress, Feinstein's bombshell now raises even more questions about its activities.*

by Ron Fournier

They spied on you. They [lied](#) to the Senate. They seized telephone records from the Associated Press and considered criminalizing investigative journalism at Fox News. What else can the U.S. intelligence community do to destroy its credibility, curb civil liberties, and ultimately undermine U.S. security?



Spy on Congress.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a *Democrat* bravely challenging a *Democratic* White House, [accused the CIA](#) of searching computer files used by her staffers on the Senate Intelligence Committee to review the CIA's now-defunct interrogation programs, potentially violating:

- The constitutionally sacred principle of separation of powers, which prohibits one branch of government (say, a runaway executive branch) from strong-arming the other two branches.
- The Fourth Amendment, which protects from unreasonable search and seizure.
- The Computer Fraud and Abuse Act and Executive Order 12333, which bar domestic surveillance.

Feinstein said the CIA "may have undermined the constitutional framework essential to effective congressional oversight of intelligence activities or any other government function.

The sad irony here is that Congress has been more of a lapdog than a watchdog to the intelligence community as its powers grew in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Under Presidents Bush and Obama, surveillance on the activities of U.S. citizens, as well as people and leaders across the globe, mushroomed to meet the challenge of 21st-century threats, with billions of dollars invested in new technologies that collect and analyze our digital trails.

Edward Snowden, a contractor with the National Security Agency, stole troves of documents that revealed U.S. secrets, many of which had nothing to do with spying inside the United States and which jeopardize national security. A portion of the documents, however, revealed activities that curbed civil liberties with no public debate, and exposed government lies.

For instance, intelligence chief James Clapper was asked a year ago in a Senate hearing whether the NSA collects "any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans." He said no, knowing that the statement was false. "Not wittingly," he said. "There are cases where they could inadvertently perhaps collect, but not wittingly."

It was a lie.

As a candidate, Obama promised to rein in the Bush-era terrorism tactics and strike a better balance between security and liberty. As president, Obama expanded the programs and did so more secretly than necessary. Polls show he has paid a price, both with voters (primarily young and liberal) who don't trust the intelligence community and with less-ideological Americans who've simply lost their trust in him.

This isn't a mere political problem. When the American public doesn't trust its national-security leadership, their support of national-security policy crumbles, and that can become a crisis.

They spied on you and lied about it. Now they may have spied on Congress. Wittingly or not, for legitimate reasons or not, the actions of the intelligence community and the White House have compromised national security.

## Peggy Noonan's Blog

### [Sen. Feinstein's Awakening](#)

Here again is the problem of surveillance professionals operating within a highly technologized surveillance state: If they can do it they will do it. If they are able to take an action they will sooner or later take it, whether or not it's a good thing, even whether or not it is legal. Defenders of the surveillance state as it is currently organized and constituted blithely argue that laws, rules, traditions and long-held assumptions will control or put a damper on the actions of those with the power to invade the privacy of groups or individuals. They are very trusting people! But they are wrong. You cannot know human nature (or the nature and imperatives of human organizations) and assume people will refrain from using the power at hand to gain advantage. And so we have to approach surveillance state issues not from a framework of "it's OK, we can trust our government" but "it's not going to be OK, government agencies give us new reasons each day to doubt their probity, judgment and determination to adhere to the law."

Today's case: Sen. Dianne Feinstein has [accused the CIA](#) of compromising and trifling with computers being used by Senate staffers in an investigation of the agency. [Here](#) is CIA Director John Brennan's denial.

What is startling in the story is that it's not surprising. The CIA is under Senate investigation, in this case regarding its now-defunct secret interrogation and detention program. You can argue whether the investigation is or is not historically justified, politically motivated or operating fully on the up and up. (Unnamed CIA officials had previously told the Washington Post that, in fact, Senate investigators had themselves accessed documents to which they were not entitled.) Feinstein is suggesting the CIA, an executive agency, used its technological capabilities to thwart, confuse or disrupt the legal investigative actions of the legislative branch. If she is correct, that would be a violation of the laws preventing the CIA from conducting domestic surveillance. And of course it would constitute a violation of the separation of powers.

But again, it's not surprising. If it is true it is very bad, but not a shock. We have been here before, as [Ron Fournier](#) notes. But this story will likely make a difference, and wake some people up on the Hill. Dianne Feinstein of California has been a U.S. senator for more than 21 years and has been a vocal defender of the U.S. surveillance apparatus since it came under attack with the emergence of Edward Snowden. She views surveillance from a national-security perspective. As chairman, for five years, of the Senate Intelligence Committee she is more aware than most of the security threats and challenges under which America operates. There is a sense she has viewed the alarms and warnings of antisurveillance forces as the yips and yaps of kids who aren't aware of the brute realities she hears about in classified briefings. Over the past decades she has been exposed to a large number of intelligence professionals who are first rate, America-loving and full of integrity, and so worthy of reflexive respect. Her loyalty would be earned and understandable.

But now she, or rather her committee's investigators, have, she believes, been spied upon. Which would focus the mind. She is probably about to come in for a great deal of derision. She should instead be welcomed into the growing group of those concerned about the actions and abilities of the surveillance state. It could not have been easy for her to say what she's said. She is right to feel and share her intellectual alarm.

## The Federalist

### Russia Proves That Democracy Has Little To Do With Liberty

#### *Still not yearning for freedom*

by David Harsanyi

I'll let the experts churn out opinions on what should be done about Russia's invasion of Ukraine (or is it the former Ukraine, yet?). But it does appear that many of them refuse to accept a number of truths about the world. For instance: 1- Most people do not share our values. 2 – Most people don't even understand our values. 3- Authoritarianism is often more popular than freedom. 4 – Democracy and liberalism are not the same. (I argue this point – not coincidentally! — in detail in my new book, [The People Have Spoken \(And They Are Wrong\): The Case against Democracy.](#))

Putin may face international disapproval from the West over his Crimean actions, and he may even have to deal with some short-term ineffectual sanctions; but at home, he's enjoying his highest approval ratings in years. Yet, we act as if Putin is acting alone. Before the invasion, the respected Levada Center [found](#) that [65 percent](#) of respondents approved of Putin's leadership. [According to the Guardian](#), the less respected pollsters at VTslOM, gauged Russian attitudes on 1-2 March and found that nearly 68 percent of respondents approved of Putin's job performance. That was right as Russian troops were entering Crimea, so expect that number to go up.

Putin has enjoyed 60 percent approval rating throughout his career, and often much higher. Despite a stagnating economy, a Pew Poll in 2012 [found](#) that 72 percent thought Putin was doing a good job. It's the kind of support that — apart from some fleeting moments of history — is, thankfully, unachievable in a healthy democratic nation. Despite some of the political rhetoric we hear at home, too much unity reflects poorly on a nation's health.

And the more Putin undermines liberal institutions the more popular he becomes. The people who vote for the presidents of Russia and the United States view are unrelated, emerging from distinct historical, moral and ideological perspectives. So expecting people — even people given a vote — to act in what we consider a logical manner, is a waste of time. While we, for example, may be confused about the harsh fate of Pussy Riot!, [only 5 percent of Russians](#) believed that the punk/activist band didn't deserve serious penalties for its actions. Actually, 29 percent believed that the band should have been sent into *forced labor*, while 37 percent believe they should be imprisoned.

So the Russian government controls the country's three main television channels, and at the end of 2013, Putin replaced the national news agency with a new and more compliant version. This undermines the free press, of course, but the ugly fact is there doesn't seem to be much anger about it. In recent years, the Kremlin has imposed limits on protests, criminalized libel, and censored political material on the internet. It has banned the work of nongovernmental organizations (typically aimed at fostering more transparency in government), frozen the assets of human rights groups that receive funding from U.S. citizens, and jailed the political opposition. Occasionally a dissident dies of poisoning.

But the reversal of once promising liberal reforms in Russia is not the result of an undermining of democracy. It happened with the full consent of the electorate. In Russia's first presidential election, in 2000, Vladimir Putin, who had previously been made prime minister, won 53 percent of the vote. In 2004, he won 71 percent of the vote. In 2008, his lackey Dmitry Medvedev also won in

a landslide. In 2012, Putin returned to the presidency in a landslide election with a parliament dominated by members of his party, giving him virtually one party rule.

Sadder still, Putin may be a better choice. It's not like there are democrats with widespread support are waiting in the wings. Remember, it was the Communist Party leader, Gennady Zyuganov, who came in second place last election *with 20 percent of the vote*. In a 2009 poll, nearly 60 percent of Russians said they 'deeply regret' the Soviet Union's demise.

Forget the Middle East, where we've thankfully stopped pretending democracy is a panacea, and take a closer look at Russia's neighborhood. In nearby Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, the country's only president since independence in 1991 and whose rule has seen widespread torture, murder, corruption, press censorship, and roundups of political dissidents, won his last election with 88 percent, 10 down from his previous high of 91 percent. In Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev has also been in control since 1991, winning 96 percent of the vote in 2011. Democracy isn't exactly a competitive enterprise there, as three of Nazarbayev's opponents endorsed him.

[In Politico](#), Gregory Feifer recently wrote:

But the real glue holding the population to Putin's regime isn't rising expectations but the country's all-encompassing corruption, starting with the daily bribes Russians must pay to traffic police, building inspectors and most other officials with discretionary power.

Obviously, there are barriers to a healthy vote in Russia. And maybe people lie to pollsters. Or maybe most people don't understand or care very much about liberalism. [According to a 2011 Pew Research study of global attitudes about democracy](#), over 60 percent of Ukrainians and Russians told researchers that they would rather have a strong leader than a democratic government.

Well, they have it now.

## Power Line

### [Sink sank, Obamacare suspected](#)

Republican Dave Jolly has [defeated](#) Democrat Alex Sink in the special congressional election in FLA-13. The margin was 48.5 to 46.5.

This was a closely watched election in which the Democrats invested lots of money and effort (Jolly was significantly outspent) and recruited a prominent candidate — their former nominee for Governor. Although the seat has been held for years by a popular Republican, Obama carried the district in 2012, albeit very narrowly, as did Sink herself in her 2010 run for governor. I discussed the numerous advantages Sink possessed in [this post](#).

The race will be viewed by Republican operatives as a harbinger of things to come in this cycle. That view doesn't seem like too much of a stretch. Sink will not be the last Democrat who sinks under the weight of Obamacare.

UPDATE: Dave Wasserman, the editor of the non-partisan Cook Political Report and certainly not a Republican operative, [says](#) “If Dems couldn’t win an Obama congressional district with a solid candidate against a flawed R, expect a rough November.”

## Right Turn

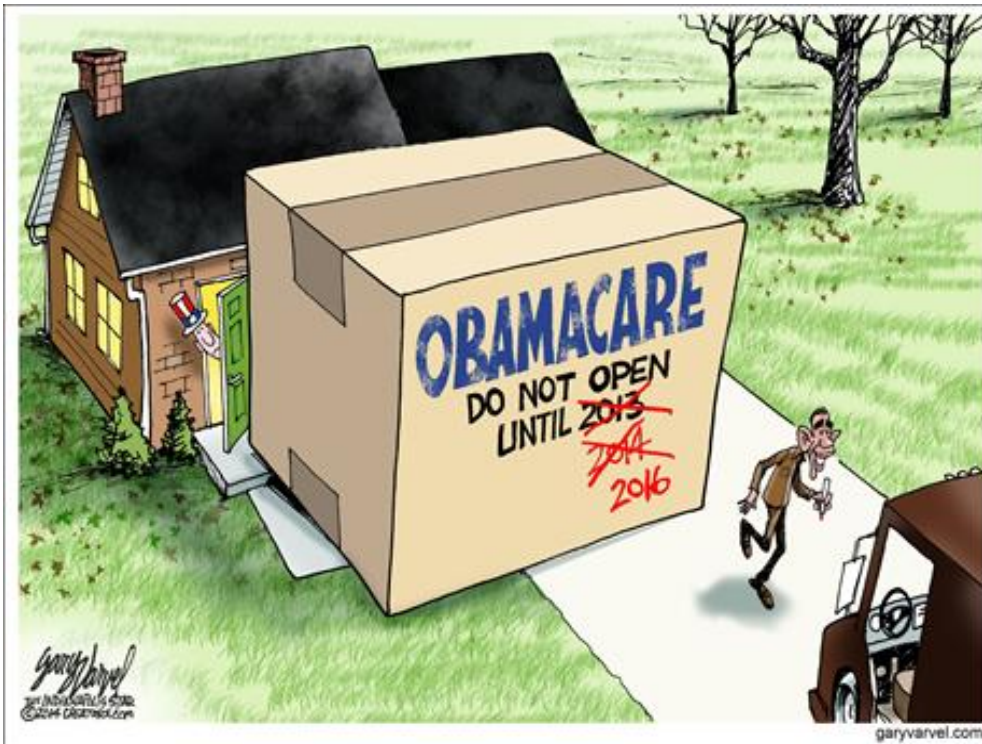
### [Takeaways from Florida’s 13th Congressional District special election](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

[David Jolly eked out a win](#) with less than 50 percent of the vote over now two-time election loser Alex Sink in a special election for Florida’s 13th Congressional District. We should not make more of it than there is, but here are some specifics regarding this election:

- Obamacare played a huge part in the race; Democrats who think it won’t be the primary issue in November may be deluding themselves. (And, unlike the Democratic incumbents who will be on the ballot, Sink didn’t vote for Obamacare.)
- [American Crossroads spent \\$500,000 on Jolly’s behalf](#). [American Action Network also spent \\$500,000](#). Another mainstream group YG Network spent six figures as well. Tea party groups did little, if anything. Perhaps they aren’t much help in the trenches.
- That said, the money came out about even when all third-party activity was counted. Neither side left the candidate to fend for himself or herself.
- Could a better candidate have beaten Jolly? Sure. And a better Republican campaigner could have won by a larger margin.
- The lesson for GOP primary voters should not be that any Republican will do; rather they should be concerned that winnable seats can slip away with a poor candidate, as it almost did in the here.
- [The New York Times](#) and other mainstream media outlets called this race a bellwether. Now that the GOP candidate won, be prepared to hear that all politics is local.
- Obama couldn’t be brought in to help turn out Sink’s liberal base, no doubt because he would have hurt her more with other voters.
- The Republican National Committee claims via an e-mail blast that it rolled out a new “precinct organizing structure and a suite of data driven tools” to help identify likely supporters and make sure they turn out. It described a “new canvassing app to gather data” and a “new voter scoring tool to find the right voters.” If this is more than spin and if it can work across the country, Republicans may take some comfort that it finally has made headway on its technological deficiencies. We’ll find out in November.



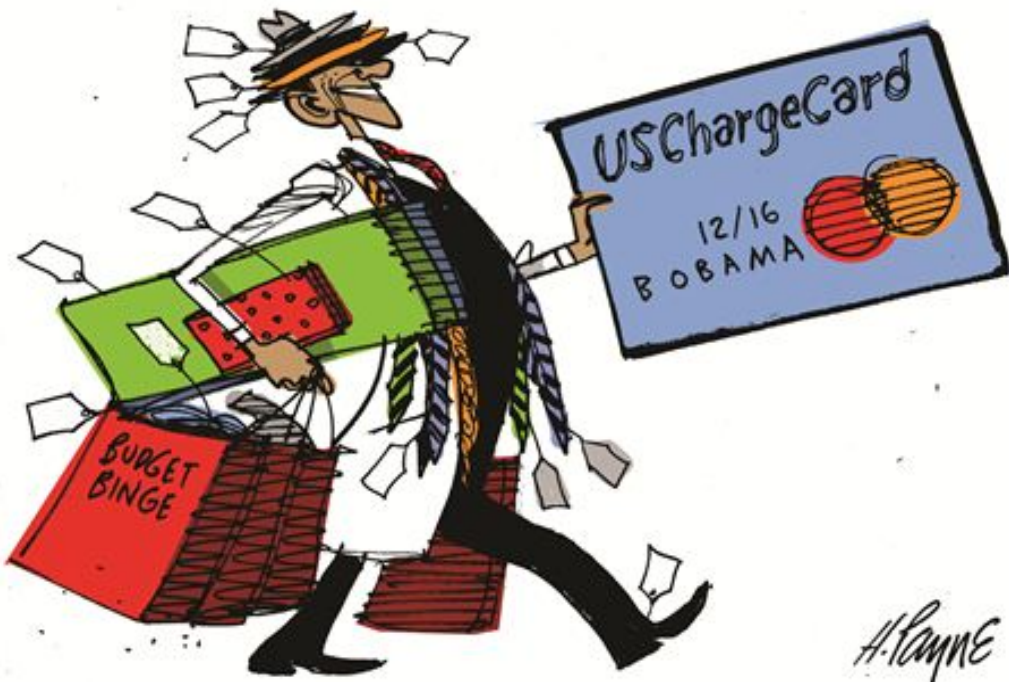


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The OBAMA BUDGET

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HEY, LOOK!  
DARRELL ISSA  
IS BEING RUDE  
TO A DEMOCRAT!





IT'S ALL THE  
FAULT OF MY  
PREDECESSOR!

