

March 13, 2014

If you're wondering why there are serial screw-ups in Washington, we have an answer. So, before we get into details of the GOP win in Florida on Tuesday, here is [Jim Geraghty](#) on why liberals can't govern.

Back in late February, a new contract document revealed that the Department of Health and Human Services would be paying \$60 million for the computer cloud that supports back-end data sharing for HealthCare.gov and state Obamacare marketplaces, more than five times the amount in the original contract. This week HHS revealed that the contract has been further revised — to roughly \$120 million, now more than ten times the original \$11 million value of the contract when Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services first awarded it in 2011.

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The EPA “research project” that took Beale to Los Angeles five times was really a smoke screen for visiting his parents in Bakersfield, two hours away. Yet his travel vouchers were barely reviewed. Officials didn’t question his expenses — they were approved laterally, by a peer instead of a manager. “Because of where he sat in the organizational structure, there were no questions,” [Office of the Inspector General special agent Mark] Kaminsky says.

Beale’s off-the-charts \$206,000 salary, inflated because of the 25-percent retention bonus that never expired, was more than allowed under law. An Inspector General’s report published last year faulted a lack of internal controls at the EPA — there was no automatic stop on the bonuses after the designated allotments were distributed.

In the same report, the IG revealed that these pay issues had been brought to the attention of Beale’s office as early as July 2010. Yet managers believed that the discrepancy was a human-resources matter and tossed it back, causing it to languish for years. . . . Beale and Kaminsky counted up how often he’d used the CIA guise to skip work since 2000. The grand total: approximately 2 1/2 years.

Investigators later put dollar amounts on his crimes: \$437,901 in fraudulent retention bonuses, \$58,127 for the “D.O. Oversight” absences, \$8,000 for the parking spot, and so on. Altogether, he cost taxpayers \$886,186.

Beale’s most recent manager at the EPA was Gina McCarthy, then the assistant administrator in the Office of Air and Radiation. She told the inspector general that she had “concerns” about Beale’s claim to be secretly working for the CIA, but there is no evidence she ever acted on those concerns, according to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

The consequence for McCarthy was a promotion; President Obama nominated her to head the EPA in March and she was confirmed in July. ...

Josh Kraushaar says a 2014 GOP wave is looking more likely after the Florida election yesterday.

Tuesday night's special election in Florida should be a serious scare for Democrats who worry that Obamacare will be a major burden for their party in 2014. Despite recruiting favored candidate Alex Sink, outspending Republicans, and utilizing turnout tools to help motivate reliable voters, Democrats still lost to Republican lobbyist David Jolly—and it wasn't particularly close.

The Republican tool: lots of advertisements hitting Sink over Obamacare, even though she wasn't even in Congress to vote for it. Sink's response was from the Democratic playbook: Call for fixes, but hit her opponent for supporting repeal. Sink won 46 percent of the vote, 2 points behind Jolly and 4 points below President Obama's 2012 total in the district.

Special elections don't necessarily predict the November elections, but this race in a bellwether Florida district that both parties aggressively contested comes as close as possible to a November test run for both parties. Democrats worked to clear the field for Sink, an unsuccessful 2010 gubernatorial nominee, while Republicans missed out on their leading recruits, settling for Jolly, a lobbyist who once worked for Rep. Bill Young, the late congressman whose 13th District vacancy Jolly will fill. Sink outspent Jolly, but the Republican was able to close the financial gap with the help of outside groups. All told, Democrats held a \$5.4 million to \$4.5 million spending advantage.

...

Byron York reports on the Florida race also.

The widely respected Florida political analyst Adam Smith sees big problems for Democrats in the loss of Alex Sink to Republican David Jolly in the special election to fill the House seat from Florida's 13th Congressional District. "Democrats had a better-funded, well-known nominee who ran a strong campaign against a little-known, second- or third-tier Republican who ran an often wobbly race in a district Barack Obama won twice," Smith wrote Tuesday night. "Outside Republican groups -- much more so than the under-funded Jolly campaign-- hung the Affordable Care Act and President Obama on Sink. It worked."

Smith noted that both Democrat Sink and Republican Jolly insisted the race to replace the late GOP Rep. Bill Young was mainly about local issues. And indeed, watching the first debate between Sink and Jolly, on February 3, one came away with the sense that issues like flood insurance played a role in the race that some outsiders didn't appreciate.

But one thing was clear from that debate, and it was that Sink didn't have much to say about Obamacare.

As usual, informed analysis from [Michael Barone](#).

... I score it as an uninspiring victory for national Republicans and a disappointment for national Democrats. Jolly got the same percentage of the vote, 49 percent, as Mitt Romney won in the district; Sink's 47 percent was below Obama's 50 percent in 2012. Turnout was 55 percent of November 2012 turnout, not an unusual decline for a special election; Jolly's total was 53 percent of Romney's and Sink's 50 percent of Obama's. Jolly naturally campaigned against Obamacare, and a Democratic loss in an Obama district confirms the unpopularity of that legislation. Sink tried campaigning on Social Security and Medicare, Democratic staples which once had a great resonance with St. Petersburg's elderly population. But the district's 65-plus population percentage, 22 percent, is significantly lower than that of several others in Florida, though above the national average. In any case, it doesn't look like Social Security is trumping Obamacare with the elderly.

If this race is an indicator of the November results, it suggests that Democrats will not get the 49-percent to 48-percent edge they got nationwide in the popular vote for the House, and it suggests that they will win somewhat fewer than the 201 House seats they won then. If that's true, it will be the first time we have had three House elections in a row with similar results, since the string from 1996 to 2004 in which Republicans narrowly won the popular vote and won majorities of seats, but in each case fewer than the 234 they won in 2012.

[John Hinderaker](#) says don't forget about the trouble Alex Sink had with the immigration issue.

A postscript on David Jolly's big special election over Alex Sink in Florida's 13th Congressional District: Obamacare was the biggest issue in the race, and deservedly has gotten most of the post-election commentary. But, as Daniel Horowitz notes at [RedState](#), let's not forget that immigration was also an issue, and may have played an important role.

Sink was pro-amnesty and "comprehensive reform," while Jolly flatly opposed amnesty and emphasized stronger borders. And Sink made an appalling gaffe—in the sense of saying what liberals really think about expanded low-skill immigration—that made the issue, in this race, an inflammatory one. Explaining her support for immigration reform, Sink said, "We have a lot of employers over on the beaches that rely upon workers and especially in this high-growth environment, where are you going to get people to work to clean our hotel rooms or do our landscaping?" It doesn't come across any better when you hear her say it"

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[Chris Stirewalt](#) of Fox has more.

*.. Whatever they say in public, Democrats know that the defeat of their candidate, **Alex Sink**, in Tuesday's special election in Pinellas County, Fla. is a very bad omen. If they cannot win in districts like these – won twice by **President Obama** – and with well-funded, well known candidates like Sink, there's little reason to believe much of the palaver about Democratic strategies for blunting Republican advances this fall. Outspent, hampered by a Libertarian candidate and with some nagging party divisions lingering on Election Day, **David Jolly** carried the*

special election to replace the late Rep. **Bill Young**, R-Fla. The race provided a revealing snapshot of voter attitudes about ObamaCare and the motivation of the Republican base. There's a long time to go until November and Democrats have just begun to spend their massive war chest, but the shape of things looks bad for the blue team's chances to hold the Senate. ...

Opportunities provided by increased production of oil and gas are so obvious, a non-political publication like Scientific American can see the value.

Ukraine is on its own, not least when it comes to energy—and that crimps the country's ability to respond to Russia's land grab in the Crimean peninsula. Ukraine relies on Russia for roughly two thirds of its natural gas supplies, suggesting that the current geopolitical impasse will likely continue to fall in Russia's favor. Even with a few months of natural gas in storage, "they're in a tough spot if those supplies are cut off," notes Jason Bordoff, one-time Obama administration policy advisor and now director of Columbia's Center on Global Energy Policy, who was a speaker on a panel of experts at Columbia University's School of International and Political Affairs (SIPA) on March 10.

Russia has the leverage to use its energy supplies as a political cudgel in Ukraine or the rest of Europe—the European Union imports one third of its gas from the eastern giant—and has not hesitated to use it in the past, most recently in 2009. Western Europe's gas purchases from Russia (then the Soviet Union) started in the early 1970s, mostly as symbolic trade—part of the policies of Cold War détente and Ostpolitik (the latter, West Germany's unilateral attempt to normalize relations with the U.S.S.R.). The resulting energy trade with Germany expanded to other Western European countries in the ensuing decades, and grew to become what some critics of détente had always feared: dependence on Russia by Western Europe for essential energy supplies.

This vulnerability may not persist indefinitely, however. In fact, this could conceivably be the last time Moscow will be able to use gas as a weapon. The world's fracking-enabled natural gas boom may, over time, upset this status quo, if not as soon as U.S. politicians would like because fracked gas cannot serve as a bargaining chip in the current crisis. ...

National Review

Why Liberals Can't Govern

Those who believe in the inherent goodness of government avert their eyes from its abuses.

by Jim Geraghty

Back in late February, a new contract document revealed that the Department of Health and Human Services would be paying \$60 million for the computer cloud that supports back-end data sharing for HealthCare.gov and state Obamacare marketplaces, more than five times the amount in the original contract. This week HHS revealed that the contract has been further revised — to roughly \$120 million, now more than ten times the original \$11 million value of the contract when Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services first awarded it in 2011.

In most professions, when you end up spending ten times what you budgeted, the consequences are swift and severe. Heads roll. Responsibilities are reassigned. Budgetary authority gets yanked. This, of course, is not how things work in the federal government.

When George W. Bush was in the Oval Office, liberals often argued that conservative wariness and distrust of government made them poor managers of it. Because they didn't believe in the power and benefits of an active, powerful federal bureaucracy, they tolerated and came to expect waste and mismanagement.

Alan Wolfe articulated this idea in the *Washington Monthly* in 2006. "Unable to shrink government but unwilling to improve it, conservatives attempt to split the difference," he wrote, "expanding government for political gain, but always in ways that validate their disregard for the very thing they are expanding. The end result is not just bigger government, but more incompetent government. . . . As a way of governing, conservatism is another name for disaster." His article was entitled simply "Why Conservatives Can't Govern."

That argument is strongly disputed, but the Obama administration has proven the flip side of the coin: Liberals' belief in the inherent goodness of a far-reaching federal government drives them to avert their eyes from its wildest abuses, even when they are occurring right in front of them. Waste and mismanagement are ignored, dismissed, downplayed, and excused, because confronting them too directly would undermine the central tenet of their worldview: that the federal government is an irreplaceable tool for making the world a better place.

The Obamacare debacle is the most vivid example of high-profile failure and limited consequences. Kathleen Sebelius continues to run HHS, despite her admission that she didn't tell the president about worries that the website wouldn't be ready on time. CGI Federal no longer has the contract to build, maintain, and run HealthCare.gov; it will have to console itself with the \$197 million it collected on a contract that was initially estimated to cost \$94 million, and with the six additional contracts with HHS, worth \$37 million, that it won between October 1, when the website launched with its myriad problems, and February. On February 21, CGI Federal signed a \$4.87 million contract extension that will ensure it works on the site at least through March 31. New contractor Accenture has a one-year deal with HHS worth \$91.1 million, with an additional \$2 million in travel costs.

Over at *The Washingtonian*, Michael Gaynor offers further details on the culture of the Environmental Protection Agency, where John Beale was the highest-paid official while failing to show up for work months at a time, covering his tracks with strange and implausible tales of secret work for the Central Intelligence Agency.

The lack of accountability throughout the organization is jaw-dropping:

The EPA "research project" that took Beale to Los Angeles five times was really a smoke screen for visiting his parents in Bakersfield, two hours away. Yet his travel vouchers were barely reviewed. Officials didn't question his expenses — they were approved laterally, by a peer instead of a manager. "Because of where he sat in the organizational structure, there were no questions," [Office of the Inspector General special agent Mark] Kaminsky says.

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published last year faulted a lack of internal controls at the EPA — there was no automatic stop on the bonuses after the designated allotments were distributed.

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Beale's most recent manager at the EPA was Gina McCarthy, then the assistant administrator in the Office of Air and Radiation. She told the inspector general that she had "concerns" about Beale's claim to be secretly working for the CIA, but there is no evidence she ever acted on those concerns, according to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

The consequence for McCarthy was a promotion; President Obama nominated her to head the EPA in March and she was confirmed in July.

The waste, mismanagement, and unaccountability is usually a bit more mundane. The inspector general of the Department of the Interior, having recently completed a review of how the Bureau of Indian Affairs leases office space, found issues with every lease it reviewed, 14 in all. The report concluded that the BIA is overspending and renting office spaces larger and more expensive than federal rules permit, costing taxpayers \$32 million.

Other examples of waste, fraud, and utterly miserable performance abound:

- At the U.S. Postal Service, a former facilities project manager pleads guilty to accepting bribes to steer inflated construction contracts, costing the USPS \$982,064.
- This week the Center for Effective Government released a report showing that in 2012 the U.S. State Department responded to only 1 percent of FOIA requests within the 20 days required by law.
- The U.S. Department of Energy announces it will need two years to prepare to clean up a nuclear-waste storage tank that is leaking. The department first confirmed that the tank was leaking in October 2012.
- Scrutiny of the General Services Administration's infamous 2010 conference in Las Vegas didn't change much. The inspector general of the Department of Commerce concluded that the National Institute of Standards and Technology conference in Orlando in 2012 incurred a number of "avoidable costs" that pushed up the \$1.1 million price tag for the event.
- The Department of Labor paid for the Washington Nationals' mascot to welcome workers back after sequestration.

Defenders of the federal workforce will be quick to point out that most of these cases were uncovered, investigated, and, in most instances, punished by the offices of the inspector general at the various federal agencies. They were, but only after fortunes were spent and wasted. As Joseph E. Schmitz, former inspector general of the U.S. Department of Defense, observes, some of the watchdogs mandated by Congress simply are not in place. Since Obama took office, the Departments of Labor, Interior, Defense, and Homeland Security, and the Agency for International Development, have gone years without an inspector general nominated by the president confirmed by the Senate.

What's more, every scandal generates a new round of guidelines and calls for better employee training, as if new federal employees needed to be instructed to follow the rules on acquisitions, not commit fraud, and not tell their bosses that they're unavailable to come in to work because they're secretly working for the CIA. The managers of the worst offenders rarely if ever are held accountable, and, as we've seen, apparently no scandal is sufficient to warrant firing a cabinet secretary. If Sebelius escaped consequence for failure, why should anyone below her worry, or anyone in any other branch of the federal bureaucracy?

Members of the Obama administration judge the federal bureaucracy the way they want the electorate to judge them: by their good intentions, not their actual results.

Jim Geraghty writes the Campaign Spot on NRO. His first novel, a comic satire of the federal bureaucracy entitled The Weed Agency, will be published by Crown Forum in June.

National Journal

[Why a Republican Wave in 2014 is Looking More Likely Now](#)

David Jolly wasn't expected to win Tuesday's special election. But he capitalized on an increasingly favorable political environment for the GOP.

by Josh Kraushaar

Tuesday night's special election in Florida should be a serious scare for Democrats who worry that Obamacare will be a major burden for their party in 2014. Despite recruiting favored candidate Alex Sink, outspending Republicans, and utilizing turnout tools to help motivate reliable voters, Democrats still lost to Republican lobbyist David Jolly—and it wasn't particularly close.

The Republican tool: lots of advertisements hitting Sink over Obamacare, even though she wasn't even in Congress to vote for it. Sink's response was from the Democratic playbook: Call for fixes, but hit her opponent for supporting repeal. Sink won 46 percent of the vote, 2 points behind Jolly and 4 points below President Obama's 2012 total in the district.

Special elections don't necessarily predict the November elections, but this race in a bellwether Florida district that both parties aggressively contested comes as close as possible to a November test run for both parties. Democrats worked to clear the field for Sink, an unsuccessful 2010 gubernatorial nominee, while Republicans missed out on their leading recruits, settling for Jolly, a lobbyist who once worked for Rep. Bill Young, the late congressman whose 13th District vacancy Jolly will fill. Sink outspent Jolly, but the Republican was able to close the financial gap with the help of outside groups. All told, [Democrats held a \\$5.4 million to \\$4.5 million](#) spending advantage.

"She's known as a tough independent businesswoman who knows how to get things done, yet [her campaign] seemed to run a more process-oriented message," said one Democratic operative involved with the Sink campaign. "I wonder if they ever really thought they could lose."

The results are a clear warning sign to Senate Democrats, whose majority is threatened thanks to a Republican-friendly map and a national environment that's tilted in the GOP's favor. At least seven Democratic-held Senate seats are being contested in states more conservative than the Florida House battleground. Conservative groups, led by Americans for Prosperity, are already airing ads blasting Democratic senators for their support of Obamacare, and their attacks have negatively impacted the incumbents' poll numbers.

One of the key questions in the race was whether a "fix, don't repeal" message would resonate with voters dissatisfied with the health care law but unwilling to give up on it. The verdict is incomplete, but it's an early sign the depth of anger over Obamacare. Democrats are hoping for higher turnout in the November midterms, but core Democratic groups usually show up in lower numbers in off-year elections, too.

"Alex Sink followed the Democrat playbook to the tee and she couldn't escape the weight of Obamacare in even an Obama district," National Republican Congressional Committee Executive Director Liesl Hickey told *National Journal*.

Another key test in this race is whether flawed Republican candidates can cost the party seats in otherwise-winnable races. Democrats are hoping to make challenging Senate races a referendum between likable incumbents and undefined challengers in red-state races in Louisiana, North Carolina, and even Arkansas with freshman Rep. Tom Cotton. Jolly's background was about as unfavorable as it gets—a Washington influence-peddler. That was the theme of attacks from Sink and other Democratic outside groups. It's only one race, but it's a sign that the national environment could trump the micro-advantages battle-tested incumbents bring to the table.

The results from this special election weren't the biggest sign of the challenges Democrats face in the November midterms. Obama's mediocre approval ratings, the nagging unpopularity of the health care law, and the Republican intensity advantage are all leading indicators.

Even more significant are the risks Republican candidates have shown they're willing to make to take advantage of the promising 2014 environment. Rep. Cory Gardner of Colorado, a famously cautious pol, jumped into the Senate race against a household name, Sen. Mark Udall—thanks to polling showing him running competitively with the freshman senator. Former Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie decided to run against the highly popular Sen. Mark Warner in the battleground Old Dominion—after no one else was interested. It's looking like Scott Brown is close to challenging Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, even though she's got sterling favorability ratings. Like Jolly, they're betting they can nationalize the races on the senators' votes for Obamacare.

Jolly's surprising victory is merely the latest indicator of 2014 shaping up to be a favorable Republican year. Senate Democrats were already facing a difficult map, but Tuesday's results suggest it's also going to be a difficult environment, too.

Washington Examiner

Florida race shows Democrats' Obamacare dilemma

By Byron York

The widely respected Florida political analyst Adam Smith sees big problems for Democrats in the loss of Alex Sink to Republican David Jolly in the special election to fill the House seat from Florida's 13th Congressional District. "Democrats had a better-funded, well-known nominee who ran a strong campaign against a little-known, second- or third-tier Republican who ran an often wobbly race in a district Barack Obama won twice," [Smith wrote Tuesday night](#). "Outside Republican groups -- much more so than the under-funded Jolly campaign-- hung the Affordable Care Act and President Obama on Sink. It worked."

Smith noted that both Democrat Sink and Republican Jolly insisted the race to replace the late GOP Rep. Bill Young was mainly about local issues. And indeed, watching the [first debate](#) between Sink and Jolly, on February 3, one came away with the sense that issues like flood insurance played a role in the race that some outsiders didn't appreciate.

But one thing was clear from that debate, and it was that Sink didn't have much to say about Obamacare. She defended the law and adopted the widely-used Democratic line that the president's health care law should be "fixed." But, like many other Democrats around the country, she had few actual ideas about how to fix it.

When Jolly asked Sink what she would do to fix Obamacare, Sink had two proposals. She would allow the government to negotiate for lower prescription drug prices for Medicare, and she would repeal the medical device tax -- neither of which would address the problems Obamacare has created for millions of Americans. Sink said there were many other fix-it ideas she could have discussed, but she did not say what there were. And her website's issues page included a section headlined, "Improving the Affordable Care Act: Keep the Good, Fix the Bad," but did not suggest any ways to do so.

"The rollout of the website and problems that have arisen with the implementation are unacceptable," Sink's website said. "The Obama administration needs to be held accountable to get the website running, and making any necessary changes to fix any problems with the law. If these changes cannot be made in a timely way, then components of the law should be delayed until these issues are addressed."

It's not clear whether Sink's weak defense of Obamacare was the key factor, or even a significant factor, in her loss. Political reporters sometimes make too much of national issues in special elections. But there's no doubt that Sink's campaign showed the difficulties of the Democrats' defense of Obamacare. They have to say they want to fix the program because almost nobody (a bare eight percent in the latest Kaiser Foundation survey) wants to keep the law as is. But to fix the aspects of Obamacare that are imposing new burdens on millions of Americans -- higher premiums, higher deductibles, a hugely unpopular mandate, and narrower choices of doctors, hospitals, and prescription drugs -- Democrats would have to advocate fundamental changes in the law that they have so far steadfastly refused to accept. Get rid of the individual mandate? To do so would rip the heart out of Obamacare, tantamount to repealing it altogether. Many Democrats would rather lose than do that.

So the Florida contest may or may not be a bellwether. But it did lay bare the Democrats' "fix Obamacare" dilemma. By the time midterm campaigning is at full speed in September and October, Democratic candidates will probably not be able to get away with listing a couple of non-germane tweaks as their program to "fix" Obamacare. If they try, they could pay a high political price. But if they suggest fundamental changes to the law, they'll run afoul of party orthodoxy and risk losing national Democratic support. It will be just another added cost of the Affordable Care Act.

Examiner

[Republican David Jolly wins Florida-13 special election, narrowly](#)

by Michael Barone

Republican David Jolly has defeated Democrat [Alex Sink](#) by a 49-percent to 47-percent margin in the special election in Florida's 13th congressional district, according to [current returns](#).

This is a district that was represented by Republican Bill Young, who was first elected in 1970, until his death last year. His predecessor, William Cramer, was the first Republican elected in Florida in modern times, in 1954, when the district included all of Pinellas County (St. Petersburg, Clearwater) and Hillsborough County (Tampa).

Cramer won 51 percent to 49 percent in 1954, after losing by the same margin in 1952; his victory was due to the increasing number of Northerners, especially retirees, moving to St. Petersburg in the 1950s. Cramer ran for the Senate in 1970 and lost to the surprise Democratic nominee Lawton Chiles, who was re-elected in 1976 and 1982 and was elected governor in 1990 and re-elected (narrowly, over Jeb Bush) in 1994. So you might say that this was a Republican holding onto a seat that has been Republican for nearly 60 years.

But some other numbers tell a different story. The current 13th district includes most of Pinellas County, minus heavily black neighborhoods placed in the safely Democratic 14th district. In 2012 it voted for [President Obama](#) by a 50-percent to 49-percent margin, and it was widely expected that a Republican would have a difficult time holding it once Young, formerly chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, was not running.

Republicans had two further handicaps here. The Democratic nominee, Alex Sink, was pretty well known, having been elected statewide as chief financial officer in 2006 and losing the 2010 governor race to Republican Rick Scott by only 49 percent to 48 percent.

Sink's late husband, Bill McBride, lost the 2002 gubernatorial election 56 percent to 43 percent to incumbent Jeb Bush. The Republican nominee, David Jolly, was a former Young staffer who then worked as a Washington lobbyist, something Democrats made sure to inform voters about. In addition, Democrats outspent Republicans here by something like 3-1 in an expensive media market, according to [this account](#).

I score it as an uninspiring victory for national Republicans and a disappointment for national Democrats. Jolly got the same percentage of the vote, 49 percent, as Mitt Romney won in the district; Sink's 47 percent was below Obama's 50 percent in 2012. Turnout was 55 percent of

November 2012 turnout, not an unusual decline for a special election; Jolly's total was 53 percent of Romney's and Sink's 50 percent of Obama's. Jolly naturally campaigned against [Obamacare](#), and a Democratic loss in an Obama district confirms the unpopularity of that legislation. Sink tried campaigning on Social Security and Medicare, Democratic staples which once had a great resonance with St. Petersburg's elderly population. But the district's 65-plus population percentage, 22 percent, is significantly lower than that of several others in Florida, though above the national average. In any case, it doesn't look like Social Security is trumping Obamacare with the elderly.

If this race is an indicator of the November results, it suggests that Democrats will not get the 49-percent to 48-percent edge they got nationwide in the popular vote for the House, and it suggests that they will win somewhat fewer than the 201 House seats they won then. If that's true, it will be the first time we have had three House elections in a row with similar results, since the string from 1996 to 2004 in which Republicans narrowly won the popular vote and won majorities of seats, but in each case fewer than the 234 they won in 2012.

Power Line

[About FL-13, One More Thing: Immigration](#)

by John Hinderaker

A postscript on David Jolly's big special election over Alex Sink in Florida's 13th Congressional District: Obamacare was the biggest issue in the race, and deservedly has gotten most of the post-election commentary. But, as Daniel Horowitz notes at [RedState](#), let's not forget that immigration was also an issue, and may have played an important role.

Sink was pro-amnesty and "comprehensive reform," while Jolly flatly opposed amnesty and emphasized stronger borders. And Sink made an appalling gaffe—in the sense of saying what liberals really think about expanded low-skill immigration—that made the issue, in this race, an inflammatory one. Explaining her support for immigration reform, Sink said, "We have a lot of employers over on the beaches that rely upon workers and especially in this high-growth environment, where are you going to get people to work to clean our hotel rooms or do our landscaping?" It doesn't come across any better when you hear her say it"

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FOX News

[CLIMATE CHANGE: CONDITIONS WORSE FOR DEMS THAN IN 2010](#)

by Chris Stirewalt

The latest WSJ/NBC [poll](#) tells us that the overall electoral environment for Democrats is worse than it was in 2010 when Republicans had their best midterm performance since **Harry Truman** was president:

-- The president hit a new low for job approval in the poll of 41 percent, 7 points below where it was at this point in 2010. Respondents' esteem for **President Obama**'s handling of the economy and of foreign policy are both markedly worse than four years ago.

-- Among registered voters, Republicans held a 1 point advantage on the generic congressional ballot, 4 points better than at this point in 2010.

-- The overall approval of ObamaCare among all adults – 49 percent saying the law was a bad idea and 36 percent saying it was a good idea – is identical to four years ago when it passed in March 2010.

SINK, SANK, SUNK

Whatever they say in public, Democrats know that the defeat of their candidate, **Alex Sink**, in Tuesday's special election in Pinellas County, Fla. is a very bad omen. If they cannot win in districts like these – won twice by **President Obama** – and with well-funded, well known candidates like Sink, there's little reason to believe much of the palaver about Democratic strategies for blunting Republican advances this fall. Outspent, hampered by a Libertarian candidate and with some nagging party divisions lingering on Election Day, **David Jolly** carried the special election to replace the late Rep. **Bill Young**, R-Fla. The race provided a revealing snapshot of voter attitudes about ObamaCare and the motivation of the Republican base. There's a long time to go until November and Democrats have just begun to spend their massive war chest, but the shape of things looks bad for the blue team's chances to hold the Senate.

[“But at the end of the day ObamaCare just represents a view of government that is put forward by this President and I think many people reject... what is important though is that a Republican in a district that **President Obama** had won twice, a first time candidate going up against a hand-picked candidate from out of town, picked by the national party, national Democrats, with all of the money behind her from the very beginning, they were wrong with their message, they're wrong on the issues. –*Representative-elect David Jolly, R-Fla., on “The Kelly File” Tuesday. Watch [here](#).*]

The ‘fix’ is out - But the killer for Democrats is that Sink was a good candidate who tried the best message the party has on ObamaCare: she supports the law's objectives but wants to work to fix it. It's the position of the House of Clinton and likely the smartest strategy for Democrats everywhere but in the bluest blue states. But as her loss suggests, the pitch is still a net loser. Why? The new WSJ/NBC News polls shows that the message of retaining but fixing the law significantly underperforms the Republican “repeal and replace” mantra. Among registered voters, about as many respondents said they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who wanted to repair ObamaCare as those who would be more likely to back a candidate pitching a “fix.” While “repeal” candidates do only a blip better in garnering support, the downside is far smaller – a 10 point difference. The takeaway: Being an ObamaCare fixer gets you less and costs you more with voters.

Scientific American

Can U.S. Fracked Gas Save Ukraine?

The conflict over Crimea may prove a last gas...p for Russian energy warfare

by David Biello

[Ukraine is on its own](#), not least when it comes to energy—and that crimps the country's ability to respond to Russia's land grab in the Crimean peninsula. Ukraine relies on Russia for roughly two thirds of its natural gas supplies, suggesting that the current geopolitical impasse will likely continue to fall in Russia's favor. Even with a few months of natural gas in storage, "they're in a tough spot if those supplies are cut off," notes Jason Bordoff, one-time Obama administration policy advisor and now director of Columbia's Center on Global Energy Policy, who was a speaker on a panel of experts at Columbia University's School of International and Political Affairs (SIPA) on March 10.

Russia has the leverage to use its energy supplies as a political cudgel in Ukraine or the rest of Europe—the European Union imports one third of its gas from the eastern giant—and has not hesitated to use it in the past, most recently in 2009. Western Europe's gas purchases from Russia (then the Soviet Union) started in the early 1970s, mostly as symbolic trade—part of the policies of Cold War détente and [Ostpolitik](#) (the latter, West Germany's unilateral attempt to normalize relations with the U.S.S.R.). The resulting energy trade with Germany expanded to other Western European countries in the ensuing decades, and grew to become what some critics of détente had always feared: dependence on Russia by Western Europe for essential energy supplies.

This vulnerability may not persist indefinitely, however. In fact, this could conceivably be the last time Moscow will be able to use gas as a weapon. The world's fracking-enabled natural gas boom may, over time, upset this status quo, if [not as soon as U.S. politicians would like](#) because fracked gas cannot serve as a bargaining chip in the current crisis.

That's not just because [U.S. natural gas supplies are currently low](#) after a cold winter. Supplies will soon rebound as the U.S. enjoys an ongoing surfeit of natural gas, thanks to new techniques to free the hydrocarbons embedded in deep shale. This can not only help bolster energy independence, but eventually could also weaken the petrodollar flow into the Putin regime.

But the U.S. has [little ability to export that gas](#) bonanza at present. Although six projects have already been approved for such export—totaling 240.7 million cubic meters of liquefied natural gas, or three times more than Ukraine imports from Russia presently, according to Bordoff—none of that will be ready for export before 2015, at the earliest.

Ukraine itself also has significant shale deposits. U.S. technology and expertise could also be shared to help develop their own natural resources, [Bordoff argues](#). In addition, improvements to the energy efficiency of industry in that country that still has an economy in transition from communism to capitalism could help cut the use of natural gas significantly, as could the development of renewables. "This is not for today's crisis but for the next one," Bordoff admits.

The Europeans could also be [weaned off Russian gas](#), putting them in a position to take a harder stand against Russian aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere in the future. But that would require them to pay more for their gas fix, outbidding Asian markets like Japan for natural gas from countries like Qatar. "The E.U. would like to do something but are in a position economically where they realize they don't have much latitude," says economist Jan Svejnar, director of the Center on

Global Economic Governance at SIPA. "The gas discovery [in the U.S.] is helping a lot in the sense that it alleviates some of the really tough constraints imposed on the behavior of Western countries."

In the end, [fallout from the current debacle](#) may impel political and economic change. After all, there is no better way to drive Ukraine toward the E.U. and U.S. and away from Russia than what Putin is doing now, including potentially cutting off the part of Ukraine that most reliably voted in favor of pro-Russian candidates.

In the meantime a new, albeit much diminished, Cold War seems well underway. The assurances about territorial integrity offered to Ukraine by Russia, the U.S. and the other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council in 1994 in exchange for that country to [relinquish to Russia the Soviet-era nuclear weapons](#) based there seem moot. And the only weapon the West has—new supplies of fossil fuels—is also one that imperils the globe via climate change. "This is a lose-lose situation for all sides," said Richard Betts, director of SIPA's International Security Policy program. "But I am a pessimist by nature, so I always hope to be proven wrong."





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