

May 4, 2014

The administration's Benghazi BS gets some treatment from a few of our favorites. Roger Simon kicks it off.

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*But as information dribbles out — most recently the long-hidden email from Ben Rhodes — the extent of this prevarication is reaching a tipping point with even a few representatives of the mainstream media (notably Jonathan Karl of ABC) stepping forward to challenge the administration. ...*

David Harsanyi says, "You know what, Dude; even if Benghazi was about a video, it's still a scandal.

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**Andrew McCarthy** gets to the foundation of the president's serial lies about Benghazi. Here is the main point: The rioting at the American embassy in Cairo was not about the anti-Muslim video. As argued here repeatedly (see [here](#) and [here](#)), the Obama administration's "Blame the Video" story was a fraudulent explanation for the September 11, 2012, rioting in Cairo every bit as much as it was a fraudulent explanation for the massacre in Benghazi several hours later.

We'll come back to that because, once you grasp this well-hidden fact, the Obama administration's derelictions of duty in connection with Benghazi become much easier to see. But let's begin with Jay Carney's performance in Wednesday's exchange with the White House press corps, a new low in insulting the intelligence of the American people

Mr. Carney was grilled about just-released e-mails that corroborate what many of us have been arguing all along: "Blame the Video" was an Obama-administration-crafted lie, through and through. It was intended, in the stretch run of the 2012 campaign, to obscure the facts that (a) the president's foreign policy of empowering Islamic supremacists contributed directly and materially to the Benghazi massacre; (b) the president's reckless stationing of American government personnel in Benghazi and his shocking failure to provide sufficient protection for them were driven by a political-campaign imperative to portray the Obama Libya policy as a success — and, again, they invited the jihadist violence that killed our ambassador and three other Americans; and (c) far from being "decimated," as the president repeatedly claimed during the campaign (and continued to claim even after the September 11 violence in Egypt and Libya), al-Qaeda and its allied jihadists remained a driving force of anti-American violence in Muslim countries — indeed, they had been strengthened by the president's pro-Islamist policies. ...

Let's spend some time on the coming election. **Josh Kraushaar** looks at the polls and Nate Silver's forecasts and suggests the Dems will do more poorly than Silver thinks. *I'm a numbers guy. As a baseball fan, I pore over box scores, regularly second-guess managers who use old-school tactics, and was probably one of Nate Silver's first readers and an early subscriber to the sabermetric reference book *Baseball Prospectus*, where he made a name for himself projecting player outcomes. In reporting on and analyzing politics, I rely greatly on fundraising reports and polling data to inform the trajectory of key races.*

*But count me underwhelmed by the new wave of Senate prediction models assessing the probability of Republicans winning the upper chamber by one-tenth of a percentage point. It's not that the models aren't effective at what they're designed to do. It's that the methodology behind them is flawed. Unlike baseball, where the sample size runs in the thousands of at-bats or innings pitched, these models overemphasize a handful of early polls at the expense of on-the-ground intelligence on candidate quality. As Silver might put it, there's a lot of noise to the signal.*

*The models also undervalue the big-picture indicators suggesting that 2014 is shaping up to be a wave election for Republicans, the type of environment where even seemingly safe incumbents can become endangered. Nearly every national poll, including Tuesday's ABC News/Washington Post survey, contains ominous news for Senate Democrats. President Obama's job approval is at an all-time low of 41 percent, and public opinion on his health care law hasn't budged and remains a driving force in turning out disaffected voters to the polls to register their anger. Public opinion on the economy isn't any better than it was before the 2010 midterms when the unemployment rate hit double-digits. Democrats hold only a 1-point lead on the generic ballot in the ABC/WaPo survey—worse positioning than before the GOP's 2010 landslide. ...*

**A. B. Stoddard** says the Dems are on thin ice.

*... The consensus, among pollsters and prognosticators, is that turnout favors Republicans. Midterm elections attract an older, whiter and more male electorate than presidential elections do, and the participation of the coalition on which Democrats depend tends to drop off dramatically. In 2010, the Democrats had a 5-point lead in the general ballot just before the party lost control of the House majority. Now they are tied in one survey and ahead by just 1 point in another.*

*The popularity of ObamaCare has seen a slight uptick in the Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll but remains unpopular enough among Republican and independent voters that Democrats, for the most part, have refused to run on it, even as all of their GOP opponents run against it. The issue continues to galvanize Republicans while Democrats hold their collective breath, in fear of a spike in premiums set by insurance companies in the late summer could create a wave that costs them 10 seats or more in the Senate. ...*

**Charlie Cook** writes on why the Dems should not be celebrating the minor scraps of good news.

*There seemed to be a pop-the-champagne mood among Democrats after the Obama administration's announcement that 8 million Americans had signed up for health care coverage under the Affordable Care Act. Democrats, desperate for good news, became euphoric at the suggestion that perhaps they had turned the corner on Obamacare, moving from it being a likely political liability to an asset, and that maybe the 2014 midterm elections might not be so bad. The fact that 8 million is less than 3 percent of the 313.9 million people in the United States seemed lost in the shuffle.*

*My impression at the time was that this sounded a bit too much like whistling past the graveyard. Now an array of new polling from a variety of sources suggests that Democrats have no reason to be encouraged at this point. Things still look pretty awful for the party. Especially meaningful to consider is that—no matter how bad the national poll numbers appear for Democrats—eight of their nine most vulnerable Senate seats this year are in states that Mitt Romney carried in 2012. Further, nine of the most competitive 11 Senate seats in both parties are in Romney states; the numbers in these states will likely be considerably worse than the national numbers. ...*

**Michael Barone** likes the idea of more tolls on the interstate system.

*It is not often that I can congratulate the Obama administration for adopting a policy I've advocated myself. But today I can. Last month in a [Washington Examiner column](#) I called for increased use of tolling to finance highways. As I pointed out, the gasoline tax is a diminishing resource -- and will diminish more as the administration's stringent auto mileage standards come into force -- and there is great resistance to raising the federal gas tax. Tolls provide a ready alternative, with transponder technology greatly reducing the cost and hassle of exacting tolls from drivers -- and with fees pegged closely to actual usage of particular highways.*

*So I am happy to see that the transportation bill (titled the [Grow America Act](#)) that Transportation Secretary [Anthony Foxx](#) is recommending to Congress includes a provision to "eliminate the*

*prohibition on tolling existing free Interstate highways, subject to the approval of the Secretary, for purposes of reconstruction, thus providing States greater flexibility to use tolling as a revenue source for needed reconstruction activities on all components of their highway systems. This section would allow any State or public agency to impose variable tolls on existing highways, bridges, or tunnels for purposes of congestion management, subject to the approval of the Secretary.” This presumably wouldn't allow tolling for purposes other than “reconstruction” and “congestion management,” but I suspect that could include very many projects. I hope Congress takes Secretary Foxx's proposal seriously*

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**Roger L. Simon**

## **Benghazi: American ‘Liberalism’ and the Mainstream Media on Trial**

A couple of weeks ago, the prime minister of South Korea resigned over a tragic ferry accident in his country for which he had no personal responsibility whatsoever.

In the USA, the exact opposite has been happening. Going on two years now, our administration has done nothing but attempt to lie, obfuscate and shift the blame concerning the events in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012, during which four Americans were murdered.

But as information dribbles out — most recently the long-hidden email from Ben Rhodes — the extent of this prevarication is reaching a tipping point with even a few representatives of the mainstream media (notably [Jonathan Karl of ABC](#)) stepping forward to challenge the administration.

What seems clear at this point is that the administration blamed the Benghazi attacks on a video no one saw in order to distract public attention from the growing militance of al-Qaeda and related groups. That militance would have been of great embarrassment to a president during an election when his vice president was running around bragging bin Laden was dead and General Motors alive.

We still do not know why no attempt was made to rescue our people during the attacks since no one knew how long they would go on and why no one has been apprehended for these attacks.

Those are only two of the ongoing mysteries about Benghazi. [Where was the president that night?](#) What did he and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton talk about in their telephone conversation? We have heard rumors of gun running, [MANPADs](#) and on and on.

But what remains is something tragically simple. The Obama administration and related entities (State, intelligence, etc.) were willing to lie about the murder of truly heroic American citizens in order to protect their behinds and, more importantly and scandalously, win an election. And people like Candy Crowley of CNN were all too willing to help them.

This is a hundred times worse than Watergate and Monicagate, in which nobody died or was even hurt and only a dress was destroyed between them. It's an absolute threat to the democratic principles of our republic.

So American “liberalism” and the mainstream media are now on trial, even if they don't know it (and a few of them do). Can they face the reality of what they have wrought, investigate and purge

themselves? The Republicans had to go through this with Nixon. It was hard, but they did it. Ultimately.

The most common reaction on the right to such a public acknowledgement by the left is — impossible, never happen, they think they can do no wrong. And those on the right who think that [have a lot to point to](#) for justification.

But Benghazi is a somewhat different situation. More revelations are coming certainly. Democratic leaders like Pelosi look nervous. Jay Carney appears like a cross between Baghdad Bob and a Soviet apparatchik when he stands in front of the press these days. And many in the press themselves stand close to humiliation, not just the president of CBS News, [who happens to be the brother of Ben Rhodes](#).

So we actually have a chance to win here. If you get cynical and give up now, if you natter on in the comments section of blogs about how media and the government will win in the end, I'm sorry to tell you, but you — as much as they — are the problem. Never give up. Every one of us has to stay the course on Benghazi until this gets sorted out.

Keep the media and the left on trial. Remember, even OJ didn't get away with it in the end.

## **The Federalist**

### **[You Know What, Dude? Even If Benghazi Was About A Video, It's Still A Scandal](#)**

by David Harsanyi

Judging from the reaction of liberals on my Twitter feed, the appropriate reaction to any #Benghazi talk is snickering and [derision](#). And the defense offered by administration, which amounts to mocking conservatives for offering any questions – former National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor dropping [“dude”](#) on Fox News' Bret Baier was tailored to parallel this dismissive attitude – reminds me that even if all this was about a video, even if the GOP's “conspiracy theory” regarding talking-point timelines is all wrong, the Obama administration's reaction is still a scandal.

By downplaying the Benghazi attack during the 2012 race, by [grandstanding](#) and [attacking critics](#), the president saved himself any serious debate about, not only the attack, but our misguided Libyan intervention, our Egyptian policy, and the administration's claims that al-Qaeda terrorism had been largely subdued. And by [continuing to make the ludicrous assertion](#) that a sophisticated tactical terrorist attack was merely a spontaneous protest by hypersensitive Muslims in reaction to a halfwit's silly video, Obama defenders remind us that nothing is more important than politics.

From the beginning the administration misrepresented what occurred. And not only in Libya. When Judicial Watch recently made available documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act public, one of them, [an email dated September 14, 2012](#), showed national security official Ben Rhodes editing Libya talking points for Susan Rice. Jay Carney (who initially claimed that these were [“stylistic changes”](#)) says the talking points reflected all protests across the Muslim world. The goal: “underscore that these protests are rooted in an Internet video, and not a broader failure of policy.” But that's a lie, no matter when the edit was made. It would have been a lie the night of Sept. 11 and it was a lie if Rice was referring to the entire Muslim world or simply Benghazi. And it's a scandal because the administration knew it was untrue and went out and tacitly blamed the United States for the barbaric actions of others.

Remember the “protests” – as the administration and media characterized them – that broke out in Egypt that day. Thomas Joscelyn [at Foundation for Defense of Democracies](#) (h/t to Andrew C. McCarthy at [NRO](#)) writes that these protests “turned into an all-out assault on the compound, with the stars and stripes being ripped down and replaced by al Qaeda’s black banner. The protest-turned-assault was a pro-al Qaeda event from the first, with protesters openly praising Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. I have identified at least three other senior al Qaeda-linked jihadists who helped spark the protest: Tawfiq Al ‘Afani, ‘Adel Shehato, and Rifai Ahmed Taha Musa.”

That sounds a lot like a premeditated “attack,” not merely a “protest.” It sounds like the embassy was under siege, left unprotected in a nation run by a Muslim Brotherhood government that the United States helped install into power. A political entity, which you may also remember, was being treated as [some sort of moderate element](#) in the Middle East by the administration. That’s a scandal.

You also remember the embassy’s [apology](#)?

The Embassy of the United States in Cairo condemns the continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims — as we condemn efforts to offend believers of all religions. Today, the 11th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, Americans are honoring our patriots and those who serve our nation as the fitting response to the enemies of democracy. Respect for religious beliefs is a cornerstone of American democracy.

*Respect* for religious beliefs is a cornerstone of American democracy? What baloney – especially coming from an administration that has consistently been hostile towards religious liberty. President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton even condemned the film on Pakistan television emphasizing [that it was not produced or authorized by the United States government](#). Despicable “apologies” to the citizens of authoritarian nations should be a scandal in its own right.

First of all, the United States government should be actively defending the right of Americans to make stupid videos if they want. Not only does it have no right to make excuses for its citizens’ freedom of expression, it sets a dangerous precedent by doing so. The president probably reinforced the notion that the U.S. *can* control the political expression of its citizens. He likely made the existence of this so-called movie known to millions of Muslims who’d never even heard of it. (We won’t even get into the [jailing of the maker of “Innocence of Islam”](#) or the government “[asking](#)” companies to remove the trailer, which is a baby step away from actual censorship.) And, as we now know, this was all done for political cover.

That’s a scandal worth talking about.

## **National Review**

### **Obama’s ‘Blame the Video’ Fraud Started in Cairo, Not Benghazi**

#### ***The e-mail revelations and the Obama administration’s lies***

by Andrew C. McCarthy

Here is the main point: The rioting at the American embassy in Cairo was not about the anti-Muslim video. As argued here repeatedly (see [here](#) and [here](#)), the Obama administration’s “Blame

the Video” story was a fraudulent explanation for the September 11, 2012, rioting in Cairo every bit as much as it was a fraudulent explanation for the massacre in Benghazi several hours later.

We’ll come back to that because, once you grasp this well-hidden fact, the Obama administration’s derelictions of duty in connection with Benghazi become much easier to see. But let’s begin with Jay Carney’s performance in Wednesday’s exchange with the White House press corps, a new low in insulting the intelligence of the American people

Mr. Carney was grilled about just-released e-mails that corroborate what many of us have been arguing all along: “Blame the Video” was an Obama-administration–crafted lie, through and through. It was intended, in the stretch run of the 2012 campaign, to obscure the facts that (a) the president’s foreign policy of empowering Islamic supremacists contributed directly and materially to the Benghazi massacre; (b) the president’s reckless stationing of American government personnel in Benghazi and his shocking failure to provide sufficient protection for them were driven by a political-campaign imperative to portray the Obama Libya policy as a success — and, again, they invited the jihadist violence that killed our ambassador and three other Americans; and (c) far from being “decimated,” as the president repeatedly claimed during the campaign (and continued to claim even after the September 11 violence in Egypt and Libya), al-Qaeda and its allied jihadists remained a driving force of anti-American violence in Muslim countries — indeed, they had been strengthened by the president’s pro-Islamist policies.

The explosive e-mails that have surfaced thanks to the perseverance of Judicial Watch make explicit what has long been obvious: Susan Rice, the president’s confidant and ambassador to the U.N., was strategically chosen to peddle the administration’s “Blame the Video” fairy tale to the American people in appearances on five different national television broadcasts the Sunday after the massacre. She was coached about what to say by other members of the president’s inner circle.

One of the e-mails refers expressly to a “prep call” that Ambassador Rice had with several administration officials on late Saturday afternoon right before her Sunday-show appearances. The tangled web of deception spun by the administration has previously included an effort to distance the White House (i.e., the president) from Rice’s mendacious TV performances. Thus, Carney was in the unenviable position Wednesday of trying to explain the “prep call” e-mail, as well as other messages that illuminate the Obama White House’s deep involvement in coaching Rice. The e-mails manifest that Rice’s performances were campaign appearances, not the good-faith effort of a public official to inform the American people about an act of war against our country. Her instructions were “To underscore that these protests are rooted in an Internet video, and not a broader failure of policy”; and “To reinforce the President and Administration’s strength and steadiness in dealing with difficult challenges” (emphasis added).

Carney risibly claimed that the “prep call” was “not about Benghazi.” Instead, according to him, it was “about the protests around the Muslim world.” Two points must be made about this.

The first involves the administration’s blatant lying. Benghazi was the only reason Rice was going on the Sunday shows. If the massacre had not happened, there would not have been an extraordinary administration offering of one top Obama official to five different national television networks to address a calamity that had happened a few days before.

Moreover, as is well known to anyone who has ever been involved in government presentations to the media, to Congress, to courts, and to other fact-finding bodies, the official who will be doing the

presentation is put through a “murder board” preparation process. This is a freewheeling session in which the questions likely to be asked at the presentation are posed, and potential answers — especially to tough questions — are proposed, discussed, and massaged. The suggestion that Rice, less than 24 hours before being grilled by high-profile media figures, was being prepped on something totally separate and apart from the incident that was the sole reason for her appearance is so farfetched it is amazing that Carney thought he could make it fly.

The second point brings us full circle to Egypt.

Why would Carney claim, with a straight face, that Rice was being prepped “about protests around the Muslim world”? Because, other than Benghazi, the “protest around the Muslim world” that Americans know about is the rioting (not “protest,” rioting) at the U.S. embassy in Cairo a few hours before the Benghazi siege. When Benghazi comes up, the administration — President Obama, Hillary Clinton, Susan Rice, Jay Carney, et al. — loves to talk about the Cairo “protests.” Why? Because the media, and thus the public, have bought hook, line, and sinker the fraudulent claim that those “protests” were over the anti-Muslim video. Obama & Co. shrewdly calculate that if you buy “Blame the Video” as the explanation for Cairo, it becomes much more plausible that you will accept “Blame the Video” as the explanation for Benghazi — or, at the very least, you will give Obama officials the benefit of the doubt that they could truly have believed the video triggered Benghazi, despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary.

You see, the Benghazi fraud hinges on the success of the Cairo fraud. If you are hoodwinked by the latter, they have a much better chance of getting away with the former. But “Blame the Video” is every bit as much a deception when it comes to Cairo.

Thanks to President Obama’s policy of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic supremacists in Egypt, post-Mubarak Cairo became a very hospitable place for jihadists. That included al-Qaeda leaders, such as Mohammed Zawahiri, brother of al-Qaeda emir Ayman Zawahiri; and leaders of Gama’at al-Islamia (the Islamic Group), the terrorist organization led by the Blind Sheikh — Omar Abdel Rahman, the terrorist I convicted in 1995 for running the jihadist cell that bombed the World Trade Center and plotted to bomb other New York City landmarks.

In the weeks before September 11, 2012, these jihadists plotted to attack the U.S. embassy in Cairo. In fact, the Blind Sheikh’s son threatened a 1979 Iran-style raid on the embassy: Americans would be taken hostage to ransom for the Blind Sheikh’s release from American prison (he is serving a life sentence). Other jihadists threatened to burn the embassy to the ground — a threat that was reported in the Egyptian press the day before the September 11 “protests.” The State Department knew there was going to be trouble at the embassy on September 11, the eleventh anniversary of al-Qaeda’s mass-murder of nearly 3,000 Americans. It was well known that things could get very ugly. When they did, it would become very obvious to Americans that President Obama had not “decimated” al-Qaeda as he was claiming on the campaign trail. Even worse, it would be painfully evident that his pro-Muslim Brotherhood policies had actually enhanced al-Qaeda’s capacity to attack the United States in Egypt.

The State Department also knew about the obscure anti-Muslim video. Few Egyptians, if any, had seen or heard about it, but it had been denounced by the Grand Mufti in Cairo on September 9. Still, the stir it caused was minor, at best. As Tom Joscelyn has elaborated, the Cairo rioting was driven by the jihadists who were agitating for the Blind Sheikh’s release and who had been threatening for weeks to raid and torch our embassy. And indeed, they did storm it, replace the American flag with the jihadist black flag, and set fires around the embassy complex.



Nevertheless, before the rioting began but when they knew there was going to be trouble, State Department officials at the embassy began tweeting out condemnations of the video while ignoring the real sources of the threat: the resurgence of jihadists in Muslim Brotherhood–governed Egypt, the continuing demand for the Blind Sheikh’s release (which underscored the jihadists’ influence), and the very real danger that jihadists would attack the embassy (which demonstrated that al-Qaeda was anything but “decimated”).

The transparent purpose of the State Department’s shrieking over the video was to create the illusion that any security problems at the embassy (violent rioting minimized as mere “protests”) were attributable to the anti-Muslim video, not to President Obama’s policies and patent failure to quell al-Qaeda.

Because there was a kernel of truth to the video story, and because the American media have abdicated their responsibility to report the predominant causes of anti-Americanism in Egypt, journalists and the public have uncritically accepted the notion — a false notion — that the video caused the Cairo rioting. That acceptance is key to the administration’s “Blame the Video” farce in connection with the lethal attack in Benghazi.

At about 10 p.m. Washington time on the night of September 11 — after they knew our ambassador to Libya had been murdered and while the siege of Benghazi still raged — Secretary of State Clinton and President Obama spoke on the telephone. Shortly afterwards, the State Department issued a statement from Secretary Clinton blaming the video for the atrocity in Benghazi. That was the beginning of the fraud’s Benghazi phase — the phase Susan Rice was prepped to peddle on nationwide television. But it wasn’t the beginning of the fraud.

Secretary Clinton’s minions at the State Department had started spinning the video fraud hours earlier, in Egypt. The sooner Americans grasp that, the sooner they will comprehend the breathtaking depth of the president’s Benghazi cover-up.

## **National Journal**

### **[Why I Don't Agree With Nate Silver](#)**

***Number-crunching Senate prediction models are fun to follow but are not very useful.***

by Josh Kraushaar

I’m a numbers guy. As a baseball fan, I pore over box scores, regularly second-guess managers who use old-school tactics, and was probably one of Nate Silver’s first readers and an early subscriber to the sabermetric reference book *Baseball Prospectus*, where he made a name for himself projecting player outcomes. In reporting on and analyzing politics, I rely greatly on fundraising reports and polling data to inform the trajectory of key races.

But count me underwhelmed by the new wave of Senate prediction models assessing the probability of Republicans winning the upper chamber by one-tenth of a percentage point. It’s not that the models aren’t effective at what they’re designed to do. It’s that the methodology behind them is flawed. Unlike baseball, where the sample size runs in the thousands of at-bats or innings pitched, these models overemphasize a handful of early polls at the expense of on-the-ground intelligence on candidate quality. As Silver might put it, there’s a lot of noise to the signal.

The models also undervalue the big-picture indicators suggesting that 2014 is shaping up to be a wave election for Republicans, the type of environment where even seemingly safe incumbents can become endangered. Nearly every national poll, including Tuesday's ABC News/*Washington Post* survey, contains ominous news for Senate Democrats. President Obama's job approval is at an all-time low of 41 percent, and public opinion on his health care law hasn't budged and remains a driving force in turning out disaffected voters to the polls to register their anger. Public opinion on the economy isn't any better than it was before the 2010 midterms when the unemployment rate hit double-digits. Democrats hold only a 1-point lead on the generic ballot in the ABC/*WaPo* survey—worse positioning than before the GOP's 2010 landslide.

These macro-indicators don't square with targeted Democratic senators—such as Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, Al Franken of Minnesota, Mark Warner of Virginia, and Jeff Merkley of Oregon—being rated heavy favorites to near locks for reelection, as the Silver and Upshot models show. The models are great at concluding the obvious—red-state Democrats are in trouble!—but blind to anticipating future outcomes, given their dependence on limited public polling and quarterly fundraising figures, and other lagging indicators. This far out from an election, their predictive value is limited.

Instead of trash talking—I'm a big fan of the data-centric sites, despite my critique of their political predictions—I figured I should put my money where my mouth is. Here are four examples where my analysis runs contrary to the models' early projections.

### **1. Republicans are in better shape than you think in Iowa, and Democrats are in better shape than you think in Michigan.**

The current conventional wisdom says that former Michigan Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land holds close to even odds in retaking Michigan's Senate seat for Republicans. Silver pegs the GOP's odds at 45 percent, while the Upshot team at *The New York Times* puts the GOP's chances at 50/50. The mere fact that a Michigan Senate race is competitive says a lot about the national environment, given that the last time Republicans won a Senate election in the state was two decades ago—Spencer Abraham's victory in 1994.

Yet the bullish predictions for Republicans in Michigan are largely in response to polls showing Land running competitively against expected Democratic opponent Gary Peters and her solid fundraising early on. But at this point, the early polls are akin to a crude generic-ballot test than anything reflecting a campaign between two veteran politicians. Most voters are unfamiliar with both candidates despite their deep resumes. And the competitive polling is affected by the early millions spent in anti-Obamacare ads by Americans for Prosperity against Peters, whose allies haven't yet matched their spending on air.

In Michigan, Republicans have a long history of seeing highly touted statewide recruits (Dick DeVos, Mike Bouchard, Pete Hoekstra) fade in the wake of organized labor's efforts, which has a solid record of turning out Democratic voters. If the highly touted investment in turnout techniques succeeds, it will have to work in Michigan—a presidential battleground with a sizable share of African-American votes and where Democratic organizers have plenty of experience.

And I'm not as sold on Land's strength as a candidate, simply based on her solid fundraising numbers. It took a while for Senate strategists in Washington to embrace her campaign, and she has kept a low profile in the race. Peters may not be a particularly strong candidate, either—the

congressman already replaced his campaign manager—but has shown some savvy in winning a tough primary in 2012 and by voting with House Republicans to roll back elements of Obama's health care law. All told, Peters is more than a slight favorite in the race, barring a large Republican wave.

By contrast, Republican state Sen. Joni Ernst is looking increasingly formidable in the Iowa Senate race, thanks to her compelling profile and rare ability to unite the party's establishment with the grassroots. A female Iraq War veteran, Ernst has struggled with fundraising but caught late momentum thanks to a catchy ad arguing her hog-castrating background will lead her to cut pork in Washington. Mitt Romney and Sarah Palin both endorsed her, and she has tacit support from Gov. Terry Branstad. Ernst is running neck and neck with GOP businessman Mark Jacobs, who has outspent her in the primary.

If she wins the nomination, Republicans could boast a compelling female contender—in a predominantly-white state where disapproval of Obama runs high. Meanwhile, Braley's comments insulting farmers at a Texas fundraiser are damaging and bound to hurt him when Republican groups use the footage in campaign ads. The Upshot pegs the GOP chances at a mere 14 percent, with Silver at 25 percent. I'd put the GOP's chances much closer to 50-50. (Even if the deep-pocketed Jacobs wins the nomination, Republicans should be able to run competitively here, although Democrats would have more opposition research to utilize against him.)

## **2. Sens. Jeff Merkley and Mark Warner are more vulnerable than the models suggest.**

As in Iowa, the models struggle with assessments featuring challengers with low name identification. Merkley and Warner are both favored to win, but by predicting them as near locks for reelection—the Upshot puts their odds at 99 percent or more—the models are underestimating the strength of their lesser-known opponents.

Warner is a personally popular senator and former governor, but his approval ratings [have been soft](#) in recent polling. He leads Ed Gillespie, a former Republican National Committee chairman who's well-known in Washington but is virtually anonymous to most Virginia voters. Yet Gillespie will have the resources to get his message out—he raised \$2.2 million in the last quarter—in a battleground state that isn't immune to the national environment. At this time in 2006, former Sen. George Allen was being touted as a future presidential candidate; he lost in a wave election to Jim Webb. With signs that 2014 could be another landslide year, this time for Republicans, it's a race worth watching.

Another sleeper race is in Oregon, where Republicans are likely to nominate physician Monica Wehby to challenge freshman Sen. Merkley. [Just watch Wehby's introductory ad](#) and you can see why GOP strategists think she could pose a serious challenge to the senator. The [problems with Oregon's health care exchanges](#)—state officials just abandoned the troubled system for the federal exchanges—also makes the health care issue a local one that a Republican doctor could effectively exploit.

Merkley's campaign released their internal numbers, [showing the incumbent at 52 percent](#) against Wehby before the primary. That's a decent place to be, but far from safe territory—especially if outside conservative groups decide to spend aggressively to target the incumbent.

## **3. Scott Brown gets no respect.**

For a former senator whose entry into the race bolstered Republican hopes of retaking the Senate, the models don't like his chances. Like Silver, I [share his skepticism](#) that Brown is as formidable a candidate as the early hype says he is. He's running against a well-liked senator and needs to overcome skepticism that he's a carpetbagger. But his chances are better than the 12 percent that Upshot gives him and the 25 percent chance that Silver does.

New Hampshire is a state that frequently follows the national environment—just look at the unstable two-seat House delegation that flips with many recent wave elections. The Senate dynamic is similar: John Sununu defeated Jeanne Shaheen in 2002—a good Republican year—and Shaheen returned the favor in 2008, a great Democratic year. In the GOP wave election of 2010, GOP Sen. Kelly Ayotte crushed Democratic Rep. Paul Hodes, who represented half the state, by 23 points.

Brown won his first Senate race riding the national wave against the president's health care law, and he's positioned to capitalize on dissatisfaction with the law's implementation this time around. That doesn't make him a favorite against Shaheen, but it gives him more than a fighting chance.

#### **4. Don't bet against Sen. Mark Pryor, but don't overestimate his chances, either.**

The two models hold wildly different views on the state of play in the Arkansas Senate race. Silver is bullish on a Republican pickup, giving GOP Rep. Tom Cotton 70 percent odds to oust the Democratic incumbent, Mark Pryor. But thanks to a recent *New York Times*/Kaiser Family Foundation poll showing Pryor with a double-digit lead, the Upshot ratings now view the Democratic senator as the favorite, with just 42 percent odds of losing. Part of the difference between the two is the models' reliance on limited public polling—Silver's model was released before the favorable Pryor poll came out.

But in reality, there's not a whole lot of difference between the polls conducted in the race. All show Pryor in trouble—stuck in the mid-40s, an uncomfortable spot for an incumbent—but holding a reserve of personal favorability that can sustain him through a tough environment. And all show the national environment in Arkansas is treacherous for any incumbent Democrat—particularly one who voted for the president's health care law.

Indeed, the *New York Times* poll that drove Republicans batty—the RNC actually issued a statement condemning the survey methodology—contained lots of good news for Cotton. His "double-digit" deficit was attributable to his lower name recognition. As my colleague Ronald Brownstein pointed out, Cotton is winning only about half of Obamacare disapprovers in Arkansas, thanks to many people not knowing who he is. That number should rise considerably as his profile grows, and would close the gap.

At this point, this race is a toss-up, though Democrats will need to disqualify Cotton as an acceptable challenger to maintain their lead.

## The Hill

### Dems on thin ice for 2014

by A. B. Stoddard

Amid a torrent of fresh and frightening polling, Democrats are clinging to some comforting silver linings: flush war chests, a few strong individual polls, a robust gender gap. But it will be months before we know if they are kittens balancing on branches or cats with nine lives.

In recent weeks, as Republicans have increased their list of targets to win back the six seats they need to control the U.S. Senate, Democrats have cheered the fact that two polls show Sens. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Mark Pryor of Arkansas well ahead of their competitors in the midterm races. Republicans questioned the credibility of the polls, but the Democrats were just thrilled not to be trailing their likely opponents.

Landrieu has outraised Rep. Bill Cassidy, who is likely to win the GOP nomination. North Carolina Sen. Kay Hagan, one of the most vulnerable Democrats this cycle, raised nearly twice the amount her likely opponent, state House Speaker Thom Tillis, did this quarter. And in a marquee race this year, Kentucky Secretary of State Alison Lundergan Grimes, who is running against Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, has managed to raise more than he has in the first quarter as well. In polling, women favor Democrats over Republicans 51 percent-38 percent, according to a *Wall Street Journal/NBC News* poll.

But that's where the good news ends.

By an even larger margin, 53 percent-38 percent, the same poll shows the voters most interested in this coming election favor Republicans. And with President Obama's approval numbers in the danger zone, under 50 percent (up slightly in the one poll and down in the other), 53 percent of respondents in the *Washington Post/ABC News* poll said they favored having Republicans control Congress as a check on the president's policies.

The consensus, among pollsters and prognosticators, is that turnout favors Republicans. Midterm elections attract an older, whiter and more male electorate than presidential elections do, and the participation of the coalition on which Democrats depend tends to drop off dramatically. In 2010, the Democrats had a 5-point lead in the general ballot just before the party lost control of the House majority. Now they are tied in one survey and ahead by just 1 point in another.

The popularity of ObamaCare has seen a slight uptick in the *Wall Street Journal/NBC News* poll but remains unpopular enough among Republican and independent voters that Democrats, for the most part, have refused to run on it, even as all of their GOP opponents run against it. The issue continues to galvanize Republicans while Democrats hold their collective breath, in fear of a spike in premiums set by insurance companies in the late summer could create a wave that costs them 10 seats or more in the Senate.

All politics is local, Democrats can hope. No, Sen. Mark Begich (D-Alaska) is not President Obama, nor is Hagan, nor is Pryor. But Obama's approval ratings are so low in red states that Dems can only hang their hope on finding something so negative about their eventual general election opponents they can get their supporters in the car to vote against them. Can that margin hold a candle to the percentage of people counting the days to vote Democrats out of office six months from now?

Creating motivation for disappointed Democrats who may have once supported the Affordable Care Act but worry about it now, who fear that vibrant economic growth might not return in their time left in the workforce and who doubt Obama's ability as commander in chief could be a lot harder than Democratic candidates expect. And pushing a minimum-wage increase, voting rights, pay equity and immigration reform may not cut it.

## National Journal

### [Why Democrats Shouldn't Be Celebrating](#)

***The Affordable Care Act's enrollment numbers mean less about the midterms than Democrats think.***

by Charlie Cook

There seemed to be a pop-the-champagne mood among Democrats after the Obama administration's announcement that 8 million Americans had signed up for health care coverage under the Affordable Care Act. Democrats, desperate for good news, became euphoric at the suggestion that perhaps they had turned the corner on Obamacare, moving from it being a likely political liability to an asset, and that maybe the 2014 midterm elections might not be so bad. The fact that 8 million is less than 3 percent of the 313.9 million people in the United States seemed lost in the shuffle.

My impression at the time was that this sounded a bit too much like whistling past the graveyard. Now an array of new polling from a variety of sources suggests that Democrats have no reason to be encouraged at this point. Things still look pretty awful for the party. Especially meaningful to consider is that—no matter how bad the national poll numbers appear for Democrats—eight of their nine most vulnerable Senate seats this year are in states that Mitt Romney carried in 2012. Further, nine of the most competitive 11 Senate seats in both parties are in Romney states; the numbers in these states will likely be considerably worse than the national numbers.

An April 24-27 national poll for ABC News and *The Washington Post* gave Democrats a single-point advantage on the generic congressional ballot test, 45 percent to 44 percent. But given the lower turnout numbers in midterm elections, the likely-voter screen is far more relevant. And there, Republicans led by 5 points, 49 percent to 44 percent. An NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll taken at virtually the same time put the two parties dead even at 45 percent among all registered voters; presumably among likely voters, Republicans would have pulled ahead by a similar lead. This would suggest a very difficult environment for Democratic House and Senate candidates, particularly those in states and districts that lean heavily Republican to begin with.

The ABC News/*Washington Post* poll showed President Obama's approval rating dropping to a record low of 41 percent, with 52 percent disapproving. More telling, just 23 percent strongly approved of Obama's performance, while 40 percent strongly disapproved. On specific issue concerns, 42 percent approved of his handling of the economy, 54 percent disapproved; 20 percent strongly approved, 41 percent strongly disapproved. On handling the situation involving Russia and Ukraine, 34 percent approved, 46 percent disapproved; just 17 percent strongly approved, 31 percent strongly disapproved. Most telling, just 37 percent approved of Obama's handling of the "implementation of the new health care law," while 57 percent disapproved; 24 percent strongly approved, 46 percent strongly disapproved. In March, Obama's health care numbers improved a bit, but this month they returned to where they had been in February. To be

fair, not all polls are finding record lows for Obama. The Gallup Poll, for example, has shown a modest improvement since last fall, to around 44 percent approval the past couple of weeks, but that's still pretty bad.

Just-released polling from the authoritative Kaiser Family Foundation showed no improvement in the public's perception of the Affordable Care Act. Forty-six percent of respondents said they had a generally unfavorable view of the law and 38 percent were generally favorable, identical to March's numbers. Both the March and April numbers were somewhat better than the dismal numbers in November and January, when the horrific launch of the exchanges dominated the news. Now, as things have settled down, 68 percent of Democrats view the new law favorably, and 76 percent of Republicans have the opposite point of view; independents come down 50 percent unfavorable, 37 percent favorable. When Kaiser pollsters gave respondents a choice between two points of view—one that "there have been so many problems since the new law's rollout that it's clear the law is not working as planned," the other that "there were some early problems that have been fixed and now the law is basically working as intended"—57 percent chose the not-working-as-planned view. Just 38 percent agreed with the now-fixed option.

One thing should worry Republicans: the question concerning what should be done now about health care reform. When given the choice between working to repeal the law and replacing it with something else versus working to improve the law, 58 percent chose working to improve it, while just 35 percent chose repeal and replace, the Republican argument. While the repeal-and-replace mantra pretty much sums up what the public has been hearing from the GOP and its candidates, too many Democratic members of Congress seem to hold the view that the ACA was the product of an immaculate conception and amounts to an infallible document, not to be tampered with. Defending the law isn't the same as trying to fix its shortcomings, and in that sense, both parties' key arguments seem off-base to swing voters.

The final blow for Democrats in terms of survey research this week was a new poll of 18-to-29-year-olds by the Institute of Politics at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The survey, the 25th in a series over the past 14 years, showed that interest among young voters is low and diminishing, and that conservative young voters are far more motivated to vote this year than their more liberal counterparts. Given the key role that younger voters, particularly young and single women, play in the Democratic core vote, the extent of the decrease among young voters directly hurts the Democrats' ability to hold onto their imperiled Senate majority and keep House losses to a minimum (winning a majority this year seems completely out of reach). The survey of 3,058 18-to-29-year-olds conducted online (this is the one age group where online polling currently makes sense to me) found that only 23 percent of Americans under 30 said they would "definitely be voting," with 44 percent of those who reported having voted for Romney saying they would definitely vote and just 35 percent of Obama voters saying they would. Self-identified conservatives were 10 points more likely to say they would definitely vote than were liberals.

Democrats should recork the champagne bottles. Someday, they may have a reason to open them, but it's pretty unlikely it will be this year.

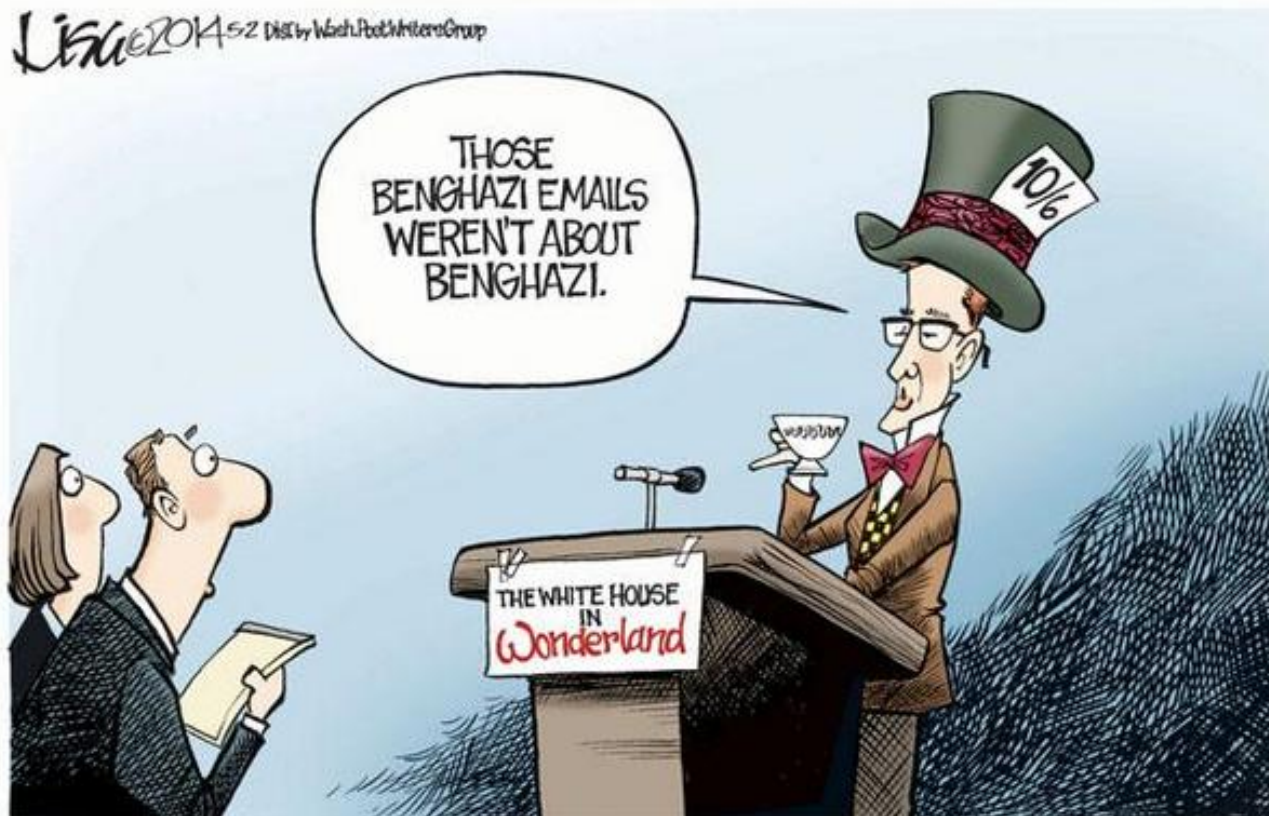
## Washington Examiner

### Obama administration endorses tolling on Interstate highways

by Michael Barone

It is not often that I can congratulate the Obama administration for adopting a policy I've advocated myself. But today I can. Last month in a [Washington Examiner column](#) I called for increased use of tolling to finance highways. As I pointed out, the gasoline tax is a diminishing resource -- and will diminish more as the administration's stringent auto mileage standards come into force -- and there is great resistance to raising the federal gas tax. Tolls provide a ready alternative, with transponder technology greatly reducing the cost and hassle of exacting tolls from drivers -- and with fees pegged closely to actual usage of particular highways.

So I am happy to see that the transportation bill (titled the [Grow America Act](#)) that Transportation Secretary [Anthony Foxx](#) is recommending to Congress includes a provision to "eliminate the prohibition on tolling existing free Interstate highways, subject to the approval of the Secretary, for purposes of reconstruction, thus providing States greater flexibility to use tolling as a revenue source for needed reconstruction activities on all components of their highway systems. This section would allow any State or public agency to impose variable tolls on existing highways, bridges, or tunnels for purposes of congestion management, subject to the approval of the Secretary." This presumably wouldn't allow tolling for purposes other than "reconstruction" and "congestion management," but I suspect that could include very many projects. I hope Congress takes Secretary Foxx's proposal seriously.





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