

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 139

May 1, 2015

State of the Nation

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State of the Nation

An average of four surveys taken from April 1 through April 22 found that 60% of Americans think the country is on the wrong track, while 28% of us think the country is on the right track.

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The official BLS unemployment rate for March 2015 is 5.5 %, showing no change from February. The rate is down 1.1% points from a year ago. If one takes into account the total unemployed + those marginally attached to the labor force + those working part-time who want full-time work, the rate is 10.9 %. This is down from 11.0% in February 2015. 2.4% have been unemployed for 15 weeks or longer, down from 2.6% in February, and down from 3.4% a year earlier.

In the third week of April (April 24), Gallup found an unemployment rate of 6.0%, down from 7.4% at the same time in 2014. It also found an under-employment rate (unemployed +those working part-time, but wanting full time) of 14.7%, down from 17.1% in April 2014.

In 2014, 8% of families included an unemployed person. This is down from 2013, when 9.6% of families included an unemployed person.

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Since the 2000 election the shares of the electorate who identify themselves as liberal, conservative and independent have grown. The percentage identifying as conservative is greater than those identifying as liberal.

The percentage identifying as conservative has grown from 17% in 2000 to 20% in 2012. In 2004, conservatives accounted for 21% of the electorate.

The percentage identifying as liberal has grown steadily from 12% in 2000 to 16% in 2012.

Those identifying as independents has grown from 25% in 2000 to 29% in 2012. [PEW]

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By 2043, non-Hispanic whites will -- for the first time -- comprise less than 50% of the population of the United States. Non-Hispanic whites will still remain the largest single group, but no group will have majority status.

By 2060, those considered minorities in 2014 will comprise 57% of the population.

By 2060, the Hispanic population is expected to double to 128.8 million. One in three U.S. residents would be Hispanic. The black population would increase to 14.7% of the population, an increase from 13.1% in 2012. The Asian population is projected to more than double to 34.4 million. [U.S. Census Bureau]

In 2014, 43% of Americans identified themselves as politically independent, the highest number found by Gallup in survey research going back to 1988. Meanwhile, the number of Democrats has dropped to 30% and the number of Republicans to 26%. [Gallup 1/15]

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While the amount of money being spent on campaigns continues to grow, the number of donors has been dropping.

There were 434,256 identifiable donors to candidates in the 2014 election, 107,000 fewer than in the 2010 election. The number of donors to outside groups also dropped. [Center for Responsive Politics]

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60% of Americans believe that it is possible for a person to get ahead in the United States if he or she works hard. This is up 6 points from 2014. Looking back over the last 15 years, the high point for this kind of satisfaction came in 2002, when 77% were satisfied with the opportunity to get ahead. The low point in this period came in 2012, when only 53% expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to get ahead. [Gallup 1/15]

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The U.S. government itself is the number one problem facing the country today. This is according to participants of a recent Gallup survey in which 18% so identified the government. Coming in at second place was the economy at 11% and unemployment at 10%. If one thinks about the economy/unemployment as a single problem, the combined problems move into 1st place, with 21%.

President Obama

The public's grade on President Obama's job approval (as found by Gallup 4/24) is 47% approval/48% disapproval. His approval rating did hit 50% in January of this year. When Obama took office, his approval rating among Republicans was 23%. At the end of the Presidents 6th year in office it was 10%.

Here are other approval scores going back 2+ years.

<u>Date</u>	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>	<u>CNN/ORC</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>FOX</u>
April 2015	xxx	xxx	48/47	xxx	42/53
March 2015	46/50	46/49	46/51	45/46 (CBS)	45/50
Jan 2015	46/48%	47/48%	xxx	xxx	45/51
Nov 2014	44/50%	xxx	44/53%	xxx	
2014 Election					
Oct 2014	xxx	42/56%LV	45/53%	xxx	41/54
Sept 2014	40/54%	42/51%	44/52	40/50%	39/53
Jan 2014	43/51%	45/52%	45/51%	46/47(CBS)	42/53
Jan 2013	52/44%	55/,41%	55/43%	51/41%	

Among the last five Presidents to serve two full terms, Obama's approval rating at this time ranks 4th.

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Clinton	60	35 (4/27/99)
Eisenhower	60	24 (5/4/59)
Reagan	48	43 (4/13/87)
<u>Obama</u>	47	48 (4/24/15)
G W Bush	36	60 (4/15/07)

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Americans' approval of how Obama is handling the economy is at 47%, up 6 points from a year ago. However, his approval rating on handling foreign policy is at 36%, down 10 points from a year ago. [NBC/WSJ 3/15]

50% of Americans now have confidence (a great deal/fair amount) in Obama's ability to "do or recommend the right thing for the economy." This is 8% better than it was a year ago. [Gallup/4/15]

When it comes to how Americans “feel” about Obama, 44% say they have positive feelings and 43% have negative feelings. A year ago, 41% had positive feelings and 44% had negative feelings. [NBC/WSJ3/15]

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When it comes to representation of the values of the middle class, 22% say that Obama does a good job, while 38% do not think he performs well. The Republican Party is seen as representing the middle by 7%, while 47% say it does not do a good job. And when it comes to the Democratic Party, 15% say it does well, while 33% say it does not do well. [NBC/WSJ 3/15]

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When Obama came into office, 79% thought he was doing a “good job” protecting the environment and 72% said he was improving the nation’s energy policy. Keep in mind that his term was only beginning and the public was likely responding to his “promises.” Since 2010 his positive high point was in 2012, at 56% approval, when it comes to the environment. In 2015 it is 52%. As for the nation’s energy policy, the positive high point was at 46% in 2013 and his current rating is 39%.

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The public is about evenly divided between President Obama and the Republicans in Congress when it comes to the President’s use of Executive actions to accomplish some of his goals, when Congress does not act.

50% say he is justified in resorting to Executive action when Congress does not act, while 46% say he is not justified. Conversely, 49% say Congress is justified in trying to block his actions. 46% say Congress is not justified. [WP/ABC 1/15]

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Congress

Based on the Real Clear Politics average, currently 72% of Americans disapprove of the job being done by Congress, while 18% approve. This represents a tiny change since a year ago, when 77% disapproved and 13% approved.

The public's confidence in Congressional leaders "to do or recommend the right things for the economy," is also up. Confidence in the Republican Congressional leaders is up by 14 point, to 38%, and of Democratic Congressional leaders it is up by 9 points, to 44%. [Gallup 4/15]

Since 2001, the number of women in the Congress as a whole has grown from 73 (13.6%) to 104 (19.4%) . The number of women in the House has grown from 60 (13.8%) to 84 (19.3%). The number of women in the Senate has grown from 13 (13%) to 20 (20%). There are 18 African-American women, 9 Hispanic women, and 5 Asian/Pacific Islander women in Congress. [CQ,CRS, Brookings, PEW]

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The House

While it is early in the cycle, prospects for the Democrats regaining control of the U.S. House are dismal. (As usual, The Cook Political Report is the source of the data below.)

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats 188

Republicans 247

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Safe in 2016	169	211
Leaning	17	27
	<u>Toss Ups</u>	
	2	9

The Senate

It is much too early to get a good handle on whether the Republicans will retain their hold on the majority in the U.S. Senate. At the moment, it appears more likely than not that they will do so.

THE U.S. SENATE

Republicans	54
Democrats	44
Independents	2

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Seats not up in 2016	36	30
Safe in 2016	8	17
Leaning in 2014	1	3
Total	45	50

Toss-ups

1 Democrat
Nevada

4 Republicans
Kirk (IL)
Johnson (WI)
Florida
Toomey (PA)

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Looking Ahead to 2016 – Contest for President

The 2016 election seems “a long way off” or “just around the corner,” depending on your point of view.

If you are a sports fan, the election seems “a long way off,” given that before the 2016 election you will experience two World Series of baseball, one Super Bowl of football, and two National Basketball Association finals.

If you are not into sports, or even if you are, between now and the election there are over 550 bedtimes, wake-ups, breakfasts, lunches and dinners to be had; 4,400 hours of sleep; and over 13,200 hours of news on the 24-hour news channels.

If you are a political junky, the election might seem to be just around the corner, even though there will be 51 State primaries or caucuses, a number of candidate debates, and two national Party conventions before the election.

Between now and the 2016 election most of what we are sure about today will prove to be wrong. Things we have not even thought about today will become part of the reality of the election.

Each actual candidate will be called upon to explain actions or statements made at some point since they were born.

63% of Democrats and 64% of Republicans are satisfied with the choices they currently have in choosing their nominee. [NBC/WSJ 3/15]

The following chart is WW's cut of the current list of real and potential candidates. Here is how I decided on the category placement for each actual and potential candidate, conceding at the outset that there is a whole lot of subjectivity in all but the "On the Field" category. (As always my views are colored by the assessments of a variety of professional pundits whom I respect: Cook, Rothenberg/Gonzales, Sabato, and other folks.)

On The Field – Candidate has filed with the Federal Election Commission; has announced that he or she is running; has announced that they are going to commence a formal candidacy; or has been particularly active in raising money or campaigning.

On the Bench – Individual has not gone so far as to be treated as "On the Field," but is sounding off and making some moves.

In the Locker Room – Individual talking about running, but not all that active yet.

In the Grandstand – Individual has been mentioned as possible candidate with some regularity, but for one reason or another is not active.

Two Democrats in this category are different than the others. Vice President Joe Biden will quickly become a candidate of Hillary Clinton should falter. This is also the case with Secretary of State John Kerry.

Not at the Game – Individuals who have mentioned themselves or someone has mentioned them, but there is no obvious action.

Announced – Not Going to Play - These individuals have specifically made clear that they are not going to be candidates. But here too, should Clinton falter, the pressure on Warren would be enormous.

[* in the chart below signifies that the candidate/potential candidate has ties to a Super PAC. More often than not, these Super PACs are being run by persons who have more than marginal ties to these candidates. For a complete list of the PACs and the person to whom they are connected see WP 4/28/15, Page A4]

On the Field

Democrats	Republicans
Hillary Clinton, 67* Martin O'Malley, 52 Bernie Sanders, 73	Ted Cruz, 44* Rand Paul, 52* Marco Rubio, 43* Jeb Bush, 62* Scott Walker, 47* Ben Carson, 63* Carly Fiorina, 60*

On the Bench

Democrats	Republicans
	Chris Christie, 52* Mike Huckabee, 59* Rick Perry, 65* John Kasich, 62* Rick Santorum, 56

In the Locker Room

Democrats	Republicans
Lincoln Chafee, 62	Lindsey Graham, 59

In the Grandstand

Democrats	Republicans
Jim Webb, 69 Joe Biden, 72 Andrew Cuomo, 57 Mark Warner, 60 Kristen Gillibrand, 48 Tim Kaine, 57 John Kerry, 71	Bobby Jindal, 43* Donald Trump, 68 Mike Pence, 55 Rob Portman, 59

Not at the Game

Democrats	Republicans
Bill DeBlasio, 53 Amy Klobuchar, 54 Deval Patrick, 58 Brian Schweitzer, 59 Joe Manchin, 67	John Bolton, 66* Peter King, 71 George Pataki, 69* Jim Gilmore, 65 Bob Ehrlich, 57 Sarah Palin, 51 John Huntsman, 55

Announced- Not Going to Play

Democrats	Republicans
Elizabeth Warren, 65	Mitt Romney, 68

Polling means very little at this early stage of the Presidential nominating process. Nonetheless, here is the Real Clear Politics average for the period 3/26/15 - 4/21/15 for the Republican contest.

Bush	15.4%
Walker	13.6
Rubio	10.6
Cruz	10.4
Paul	9.4
Huckabee	7.8
Carson	5.8
Christie	5.6

Perry	2.4
Santorum	2.0
Kasich	1.8
Jindal	1.3

Unless something totally unexpected happens, the Democratic contest is all but over. Here are the RCP numbers over the same time period as above.

Clinton	62.2
Warren	12.7
Biden	9.8
Sanders	5.6
O'Malley	1.6
Webb	1.4
Chafee	.3

Clinton leads all potential opponents in RCP's general election face-offs by margins ranging from 7.5 points against Rubio to 13.3 points against Carson.

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In a recent Gallup survey (3/15), Democratic respondents were asked to express their favorable/unfavorable attitude about Hillary Clinton and a number of other potential Democratic candidates. It's no surprise that Clinton, who was by far and away the best known, ranked considerably higher than the others.

WW did an analysis of this that may not be treated as particularly valid among those who are purists about data. For example, in the case of Clinton, 7% said they never heard of/have no opinion of her. So the denominator of the equation to determine favorability changes from 100% to 93%. Clinton's favorability in the Gallup survey is 79%, and in the WW recalculated version it is 85%.

In the Gallup survey of favorability, Joe Biden he is known by 81% of the population, and his favorability is 64%. In the WW recalculated version it is 79%.

Elizabeth Warren is known by 53% of the population. Her favorability in Gallup is 37%. In the WW recalculated version it is 79%.

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If Clinton is the nominee, which seems likely, and she is then elected president not only will she be the first woman elected to that office, but she will also be the first Democrat to succeed a two term Democratic incumbent in the office in the last 180 years. [Amy Walters]

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If you want to be elected President of the United States you had better win your Party's Iowa caucus and the South Carolina primary. Beginning with 1976 (as far back as WW looked), no person who was elected President failed to win both of these contests. New Hampshire, the first primary in the nation, does not have the same record. Over the same time period, in three of the election cycles, the ultimate winner of the Presidency did not win the New Hampshire primary: 1992, 2000, and 2008.

Here is the primary/nomination schedule as presently available.

- ☐ Feb 1: Iowa caucuses
- ☐ Feb 9: New Hampshire primary
- ☐ Feb 20: Nevada caucuses
- ☐ Feb 27: South Carolina primary
- ☐ Feb. 23: Michigan (election law states that the primary should be held on the 4th Tues of Feb., but this might change)

All other States can hold their primaries any time between March 1 and the end of June, per Republican and Democratic National Committee guidelines.

The following is a tentative list (subject to change) of the remaining States.

March

1- Colorado caucuses, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, North Carolina
5- Louisiana
8- Alabama, Hawaii R caucuses, Mississippi, Ohio, Michigan
13- Puerto Rico
15- Florida, Illinois, Missouri
22- Arizona

April

5- Maryland, District of Columbia, Wisconsin

26- Connecticut, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island

May

3- Indiana

10- Nebraska, West Virginia

17- Kentucky, Oregon

24- Arkansas

June

7- California, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota

28- Utah

Conventions:

- ☐ Republicans: July 18-21, Cleveland, Ohio
- ☐ Democrats: July 25-28, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Restaurants

The two restaurants written about in this issue of WW very much operate at opposite ends of the dining spectrum, from formal to informal, fancy to plain, and expensive to inexpensive. Yet, each in its own way offers an enjoyable dining experience.

Marcel's
2401 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-296-1166

Marcel's opened in DC in 1999. I have driven past it hundreds, if not thousands of times. Yet, until March 26th of this year, I had never gone there for a meal. That was a mistake.

Karen, Larry, Debbie, and I had dinner at Marcel's, the only meal for which the restaurant is open.

As you enter, the reception stand is straight ahead. To the right is a bar, which is where Karen and Larry were waiting for us. The bar seats up to 14 people on high stools with backs. There are a number of 4-person tables as well. Folks with whom I talked after being there talk of eating at the bar when they are at the restaurant alone.

There are 120 seats. Half that number are located in the back of the main dining room. A curtain can be pulled across the restaurant to provide some privacy. Groups of 15 to 60 can be accommodated in this area.

We were given a plate of small potato bread rolls to munch on while we examined the menu.

A number of edible items were provided for the table on round plates with a good sized hole in the middle of the plate. The hole in the plates is placed around a candle that is burning in the center of the table.

There is a pleasant formality about the restaurant. The servers, all men, wear dark suits, white shirts, and dark ties. The service is as good as any we have ever experienced and better than most. The tables are covered in white linen. The chairs are sturdy and padded.

The extensive menu is designed to be a series of tasting menus, from four to seven courses, ranging in price from \$90 - \$150, before the cost of wine or other alcoholic beverages.

In looking at the menu, it appears that you are stuck with the tasting menu structure of your meal. However, it turns out that there is considerable flexibility and accommodation. One of our party does not eat dairy. The server noted the milk content of various dishes, especially those served to the table without being ordered. And, while there is not a green salad on the menu, an excellent green salad was provided to the person who does not eat dairy, as a substitute for one of the courses. The bottom line is, all tasting menu items may be ordered a la carte. The restaurant will figure out the bill.

Karen – Arugula salad; La Belle Farm Duck Breast, Baby Bok Choy, Duck Confit Pave ,Cumquats, Duck Gastrique

– English Pea Soup, Randal Lineback Veal Meatball, Crème Fraiche, Scallions; La Belle Farm Duck Breast, Baby Bok Choy, Duck Confit Pave, Kumquats, Duck Gastrique

Larry – American Red Snapper, Ratatouille, Artichoke, Sundried Tomato, Nicoise Olive, Balsamic Reduction; Braised Short Rib Tortellini, Roasted Baby Turnips, Spiced Goat Cheese, Madeira Sauce

Mike – Cold Smoked Alaskan Halibut, Orange Supremes, Watercress, Citrus Emulsion, Braised Short Rib Tortellini, Roasted Baby Turnips, Spiced Goat Cheese, Madeira Sauce; Dark Chocolate Tower, Milk Chocolate, Crème Legere, Vanilla Risotto, Hazelnut Crunch. Larry and Debbie each had a taste.

There was one incident that annoyed Debbie. Debbie made the reservation in her name, Cowan, on Open Table. When we arrived, our friends were sitting at the bar. We waved and said hello, and shortly thereafter, the maître d’ called me by name, saying our table was ready. The fact that he called my name was unusual because he and I had never met. When Debbie questioned his calling my name, I suggested that her friends had told him they were waiting for the Bermans.

A few days later, Debbie received a note from Open Table commenting on the fact that she had not kept her reservation at Marcel’s. She responded appropriately.

The restroom is as well appointed and maintained as the rest of the restaurant. As you enter, to the right there is a large painting. Directly ahead is a large black marble deck at waist height, which includes two white ceramic, sunken wash basins. Above is a large mirror. To the left of the wash basins is a floor-to-ceiling wall that separates the wash basins from two wall-hanging white urinals.

There is a separate, full-doored commode room with a single white ceramic commode. The floor is covered with large, very dark tiles with natural white strains running through them.

Jackets are “required” for men, but it is clearly not enforced. On the other hand, jeans are really not allowed.

There is valet parking. On departure ask that your car be brought around a few minutes before you are ready to leave. (This was suggested by our server.)

Debbie agreed that we would be returning.

And several weeks later we did return, this time with Kate and Tony.

While there were a few items on the menu that were the same as those on the menu the first time we ate there, most of the items were different.

One thing in particular was the same, the reception and service were absolutely top of the line. We ended up at the same table with the same server as our first visit. Tony and I each had four courses, while Kate and Debbie selected three. We also enjoyed a tasting of the desserts that Kate and Debbie ordered.

Kate – Commercial Crusted Softshell Crab; Short Rib Tortellini; Labelle Farm Duck Breast

Debbie – Gratin of Penn Cove Mussels; Commercial Crusted Softshell Crab; Martin's Angus Filet Mignon

Tony – Pan Seared Fluke; Marcel's Classic Boudin Blanc; Trio of Rabbit; Martin's Angus Filet Mignon

Mike – Blue Cheese Stuffed Poached Pear; Pan Seared Fluke; Commercial Crusted Softshell Crab; Trio of Rabbit

The two desserts we shared were Toasted Meringue and Cream Cheese Chiffon, Caramel Gelato, Roasted Apples, Brown Sugar Glaze; and Glazed Milk Chocolate Flan, Mango Compote, Caramel Sesame Tuile, Mango Sorbet.

Yes, we will be going back. By the way, when we entered the second time, Debbie could not resist telling the maître d' about the call she received from Open Table.

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Bistroquet
5100 MacArthur Blvd
Washington DC 20016
202-244-9511
www.bistroquetdc.com

Bistroquet is a relatively new restaurant on the site of what was for many years, Listrani's.

Debbie, Tom and I had lunch there shortly after it opened, and we were underwhelmed.

Lee and I had dinner there a few days ago, and it was a totally different experience.

The restaurant has two rooms, with a total of just over 60 seats composed of 2 tops, 4 tops and potentially 6 tops.

There is also a carry-out and delivery menu, which is quite different from the in-restaurant menu; more about that later.

Lee started with Salad Maison followed by Confit de Canard. I started with a Pea Soup special, followed by the Cassoulet Maison, house-made cassoulet with lamb, port and duck confit. The size of the cassoulet was such that it could easily satisfy two people.

Appetizers run from \$8 - \$14 and entrees from \$16 - \$28.

As we were eating I noticed two people coming in. The man who was using a cane was having a difficult time navigating the several steps and landing that are part of the front entrance. A person standing near the back of the room who appeared to be a busboy, and who also was the delivery person, rushed to the front door to provide useful help.

The carry out/delivery menu includes six pizzas (medium/large), including the likes of a Stir Fried Vegetable offering with garlic, onion, fresh tomatoes, bell pepper, zucchini, mushrooms, olives, spinach and capers. There are five sandwiches, the likes of a Three Pork Sub with pork tenderloin, smoked ham, bacon with green salsa, lettuce, tomato and onion.

It appears from the carry-out menu that one can also order items from the regular in-restaurant menu for delivery.

Delivery is available within two miles of the restaurant, but not across the bridge.

Parking is generally available on the street.

Mike

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