

Mike Berman's

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State of the Nation

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President Obama

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Who will vote

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The Races

U.S. Senate, U.S House, President

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A Guest Book

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State of the Nation

In the fourth week of April, the NBC/WSJ poll found that 63% of us think the country is on the wrong track. In April 2013, 61% held that view. The ABC/

WP survey taken at the same time found that 66% believed the country was on the wrong track. In May 2013, 57% held that view.

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The official BLS unemployment rate for April 2014 is 6.3%, down from 7.5% one year ago. While this is evidence of an improving employment situation, it may not be as positive as it appears. 800,000 additional people dropped out of the work force and the participation rate is 62.8%, down from 64% a year ago.

In early May, Gallup found an unemployment rate of 6.9%, down from 7.4% a year ago. It also found an underemployment rate (unemployed +those working part-time, but wanting full time) of 16.1%

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Here is a partial portrait of the country as reflected by the current NBC/WSJ survey. Most notable, more people have a positive view of the IRS than large corporations, health insurance companies, and the financial industry.

- 55% believe the economic and political systems in the country are stacked against people like them
- 26% think the economy will get better in the next 12 months, while 26% think it will get worse
- 48% think that globalization has been bad for the US economy, while 43% think it has been good
- Confidence in American institutions, other than the military and the high tech industry, is in the tank

Here are the confidence levels

Military 69%; high-tech 53%; the internet 39%; Supreme Court 32%; public schools 29%; auto industry 27%; religious leaders and organizations 24%; telecommunications industry 23%; national news media 19%; online social networking websites 18%; Federal government 16%; IRS 15%; large corporations 13%; health insurance companies 13%; financial industry 13%.

- Democratic Party is viewed negatively by 37%, while 36% view it positively
- Republican Party is viewed negatively by 44%, while 25% view it positively
 - Tea Party is viewed negatively by 41%, while 22% view it positively

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By 40% to 34% the Democratic Party is trusted to do a better job than the Republican Party in dealing with the main problems the nation faces over the next few years.

When asked which political party is most trusted to deal with a series of specific problems, the Democrats led on every issue except dealing with the Federal budget deficit. The most dramatic space between the two parties is the Democratic advantage in dealing with “issues that are especially important to women.”

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Immigration issues	40%	34%
Federal budget deficit	35%	44%
Helping the middle class	52%	32%
Issues especially important to women	55%	25%

And when asked which political party is closer to their own opinion on a variety of issues, Republicans are rated higher than Democrats only on the issue of gun control.

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Gun control	39%	44%
Abortion	43%	35%
Gay marriage	45%	31%
Raise minimum wage or not	49%	33%
Global warming/climate change	47%	29%

[ABC/WP 5/14]

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President Obama

The public’s grade on the job President Obama is doing (as found by Gallup 5/7-9/14) is 45% approval/50% disapproval. Of the 6 most recent, two-term

Presidents at this point in their second term, Obama's current approval rating is better than George Bush II and Richard Nixon. He trails Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Dwight Eisenhower. The list of 6 follows:

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Reagan	68	23 (5/19/86)
Clinton	64	31 (5/10/98)
Eisenhower	53	32 (5/12/58)
<u>Obama</u>	44	50 (5/9/14)
G Bush (II)	33	61 (5/11/06)
Nixon	25	58 (5/13/74)

<u>Date</u>	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>	<u>CNN/ORC</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>
May 2014	xx	xx	43/55%	xx
Apr 2014	44/50%	41/52%	xxx	xx
Mar 2014	41/54%	46/50%	43%/53%	43/50%
Feb 2014	xx	xx	xx	41/51%
Jan 2014	43/51%	45/52%	45/51%	46/47%(CBS)
Dec 2013	43/54%	43/55%	41/56%	42/50%
Oct 2013	42/51%	48/49%	43/53%	46/49% (CBS)
Sept 2013	45/50%	47/47%	45/52%	46/46%
July 2013	45/50%	49/44%	xxx	48/45% (CBS)
Jan 2013	52/44%	55/41%	55/43%	51/41%

In its recent survey, ABC/WP asked whether folks approved of how Obama has handled several issues. In each case, substantial disapproval was reflected.

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>
The economy	42%	54%
Situation involving Russia and Ukraine	34%	46%
Implementation of new healthcare law	37%	57%

The NBC/WSJ survey found Obama's rating on the economy identical to that above. However, by 53% to 38% those surveyed disapprove of Obama's overall performance on foreign policy.

On a positive note, a majority of Americans (53%/46%) agree - that Obama has the “personality and leadership qualities a President should have.” [CNN/ORG 5/14]

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I asked a number of people whom I think have a prudential view of the Federal government what word or phrase they would use to describe Obama. Here are their answers: disengaged; diffident; frustrated; checked out; not willing to deal; no relationships; overwhelmed by foreign affairs; free world is looking to him for leadership and not finding it; on Syria he lost his way and Putin stepped in.

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Who will vote in 2014

According to the NBC/WSJ survey, interest in the 2014 election is about where it was at this time in 2010, but lower than it was 2006. The survey uses a scale of 1 to 10, in which 10 signifies that the respondent is very interested in the election.

Following is the percentage of respondents who selected 8, 9 or 10.

<u>4/14</u>	<u>5/10</u>	<u>5/06</u>
67%	68%	72%

Gallup presents a less positive picture, although it uses a different question. At the end of April, Gallup asked respondents whether they were more or less enthusiastic about the coming election than they have been in previous elections. 53% said they were less enthusiastic, while 35% said they were more enthusiastic. This is a rather dramatic shift from 2010, when 52% said they were more enthusiastic. It is also a negative shift from 2006, but less dramatic.

Currently, 42% of Republicans and only 32% of Democrats describe themselves as more enthusiastic; while 50% of Republicans and 55% of Democrats say they are less enthusiastic. [Note: While the 2014 data is based on current surveys, the 2010 and 2006 date is based on annual averages.]

And the ABC/WP April survey asked registered voters whether they were certain to vote (68%), would probably vote (15%), and if voting was only a 50/50 chance (12%). In June 2010, 72% said they were certain to vote and 14% said they would probably vote.

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David Winston and Myra Miller have charted the political party composition of the Congressional electorate over the last 30 years, based on exit polls. The chart below reflects turnout from the lowest to the highest in Presidential and off-year elections. Their conclusion is that Independents and non-affiliated voters are playing an increasing role in our elections.

Presidential Year		Off-Year	
<u>Year</u>	<u>Two Party Turnout %</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Two Party Turnout %</u>
2012	72	2010	70
2008	73	1990	71
1988	74	1994	72
1984	75	1998	73
1992	75	1986	74
2000	75	2006	74
1996	76	2002	78
2004	76		

They also looked at the participation of younger voters (18-29) in House elections, i.e., what the percentage of the electorate young voters were in each election in the last 25 years.

<u>Presidential years</u>		<u>Non-Presidential years</u>
1990		14%
1992	20%	
1994		13%
1996	17%	
1998		13%
2000	16%	
2002		11%
2004	16%	
2006		12%
2008	18%	
2010		12%
2012	19%	

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Apathy toward participation in the electoral process was most recently demonstrated in the hotly contested North Carolina, U.S. Senate Republican primary. Only 16% of eligible voters cast ballots in that election.

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In 2014, 47% of registered voters describe themselves as Republican/Lean Republican. This is 6% points higher than in 2006 and 3% points higher than in 2010. 43% of registered voters describe themselves as Democrat/Leaning Democrat: this is 8% points down from 2006 and about the same as in 2010. [PEW 5/14]

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The Congress

13% of Americans approve of the way Congress is doing its work. There has been little change in recent months.

Among registered voters, 45% say they will vote for the Democratic candidate and 46% for the Republican candidate. Men lean to the GOP candidate by 48% to 40%, while women lean to the Democratic candidate 50% to 43%. Those 50-64 years of age favor the Democrat 51% to 42%, while those over age 65 favor the Republican candidate 52% to 42%. [CNN/ORG 5/14]

In late April, the ABC/WP survey found 44% voting for the Republicans and 45% voting for the Democrats. Also in late April, the USA Today/Pew survey found 47% voting Republican, while 43% are voting Democratic.

Among registered voters 20% say that their vote for a Congressional candidate will be a message that they support Obama, while 25% say they will be sending a message that they oppose Obama. This is essentially identical to the number who were using their vote to support or oppose Obama in September 2010. [CNN/ORG 5/14]

However, PEW found that, while 31% of Democratic voters are saying their vote is for Obama, this is a substantial fall from the 47% who took that position in 2010. Among Republicans ,46% say their vote is against Obama, which is a 4% point increase from 2010. [PEW 5/14]

Assuming that the Republicans will continue to control the House of Representatives after this next election, 42% would prefer that the Republicans control the Senate as well. 45% prefer that the Democrats remain in control of that body. [CNN/ORG 5/14]

USA Today (5/5/14) took a look at the ultimate effect of the “generic” ballot at this time in the non-Presidential election year cycle.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>GOP</u>	<u>Result</u>
4/14	43%	47%	To be determined
2010	44%	44%	GOP gains 63 seats
2006	51%	41%	Dems gain 31 seats
2002	46%	44%	GOP gains 8 seats
1998	52%	40%	Dems gain 5 seats
1994	47%	45%	GOP gains 54 seats

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22% of registered voters think that most members of Congress deserve re-election. This is the lowest number ever recorded. The next lowest number was 29%, which was an average for 1992.

50% of registered voters say that the representative in their own Congressional district deserves re-election. This includes 53% of Republicans, 52% of Democrats, and 47% of Independents. [Gallup 5/14/14]

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It is 7:00 a.m. December 6th and...

“It is 7:00 a.m. December 6th and the polls are opening in Louisiana. No one got a majority in the so-called ‘jungle primary’ which was held on November 4th, so the top two finishers compete today.

“At the moment the Senate is divided 50/50. If Mary Landrieu wins, it will stay that way with Vice President Joe Biden casting the tie breaking vote, that is unless an incumbent Democrat decides to switch.

“If Landrieu loses, the Republicans will control the Senate 51/49. “

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The last time the Senate split 50/50 was during the 107th Congress, which began in January 2001. When the Senate convened on January 3 of that year, the Democrats were in control with still Vice-President Al Gore casting the 51st vote.

On January 20th George W. Bush and Dick Cheney were sworn in and the Republicans took control, with Cheney casting the 51st vote. That control lasted until June 6, 2001, when a sitting Republican Senator, Jim Jeffords of Vermont, announced that he was becoming an Independent, and that he would caucus with the Democrats, giving them a one seat advantage.

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Currently, there are 9 Toss-Up seats in the Senate, 7 of which are currently held by Democrats and 2 by Republicans. Current “conventional wisdom” is that the Republicans will hold their 2 Toss-Up seats and that South Dakota, Montana, and West Virginia, currently held by Democrats, will definitely switch. Thus, to achieve control, the Republicans need only pickup 3 of the 7 Democratic Toss-up States. New Hampshire and Oregon could become more competitive.

One commentator in whom I have great confidence thinks the Republicans will have achieved control on November 4th. That person is currently predicting a loss of 6-8 incumbent Democratic seats before you get to Louisiana.

Another smart follower of the races, when told the above, reminded me that only three Democratic incumbents have lost their races since 2004, and no two were in the same year.

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A recent survey of potential Democratic campaign target voters provides substantial evidence that there is a pool of voters who, if Democrats can stimulate them, would hold off what appears to be an inevitable Republican takeover of the Senate. [80% of these targeted voters are described as mid-term drop-off voters and the rest as inconsistent or new registrants.]

So-called mainstream Republicans seem to be doing a better job this cycle of promoting Senate candidates who do not appear to be as far to the right as some of those in the last couple of cycles, and who may well have cost them seats.

However, the candidates are solid conservatives. And some, like new nominee Ben Sasse in Nebraska, had both mainstream and Tea party support.

THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats	53
Republicans	45
Independents	2

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Seats not up in 2014	34	30
Safe in 2014	10	13
Leaning in 2014	1	3
Shaheen (NH)		Walsh (MT)
		West Virginia
		South Dakota
Total	45	46

Toss-ups

7 Democrats	2 Republicans
Iowa	McConnell (KY)
Landrieu (LA)	Georgia
Hagan (NC)	
Pryor (AR)	
Michigan	
Begich (AK)	
Udall (CO)	

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There is little or no theater in watching the 2014 House of Representatives elections. The Republicans will retain control and, based on today's "facts," are likely to pick up seats. (Cook Political Report is my bible here.)

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats	201
Republicans	233
Vacant	1 (G)

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Safe in 2014	160	195
Leaning	28 (1Dem seat)	34 (includes 2 Democrat seats)
	<u>Toss Ups</u>	
	13	5

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2016

The following have talked or been talked about as potential Presidential candidates in 2016.

<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Democrats</u>
Jeb Bush	Joe Biden
Chris Christie	Hillary Clinton
Bobby Jindal	Andrew Cuomo
Rand Paul	Kristin Gillibrand
Marco Rubio	Amy Klobuchar
Paul Ryan	Martin O'Malley
Mike Pence	Elizabeth Warren
John Kasich	Howard Dean
Scott Walker	
Ted Cruz	

Working against whomever wins the Democratic nomination is the fact that since the mid-1940s the same Party has won the Presidency back-to-back only once: 1980-1992 (Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush).

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Restaurants

Fiola Mare
3050 K St. NW
31st Street & Waterfront
Washington, DC

202-628-0065
info@fiolamare.com

First there was Fiola (WW October 2013), then Casa Luca (WW September 2013), and now Fiola Mare. All are the creation of Fabio Trabocchi, the Chef/Owner, with Maria Trabocchi, the Director of Guest Relations.

Fiola Mare is located on the edge of the Potomac River. It is part of Washington Harbor, but the entrance to the restaurant is on 31st street.

As you enter the restaurant there is a guest greeter and a number of people who seat people. Immediately to the left is an L-shaped full bar with high stools. You can eat at the bar, but I am told by someone with experience that there is a shortened bar menu.

There is a second full bar at the far end of the restaurant, which I assume will be used for large private parties at that end of the restaurant.

In the center of the restaurant, on the wall away from the water, is an open kitchen. Then there are two very long, curved-at-the-end banquettes with which you can create 2s or 4s, etc. In the center of the restaurant and through to the far end are a series of tables and chairs, 2s, 4s, 6s depending on the need. When a 4 top is converted to a 6 top it gets a little too close to the 4 top next to it.

On the water side of the restaurant there are a series of tables and benches that look like picnic tables. To avoid the discomfort of benches there are thick, bright blue pads on the seats and back. There are 4s and 2s that can be turned into 6s. This wall of the restaurant is floor-to-ceiling glass sliding doors that can be opened in good weather.

The restaurant has been constructed so as to be readily subdivided, and at the end furthest from the front entrance, there is a room that has a single long table that looks to seat a dozen people.

Debbie and I first had dinner there with Rita and Bob. A few days later we had lunch there with Marybeth and Steve.

Rita and I started with a salad, Colors of the Garden, with lettuce, strawberries, purple asparagus, green almonds, tangerine, blood orange, basil.

Debbie and Bob began with Jumbo Lump Crab Salad, slow roasted San Marzano tomatoes, yuzu, spring sorrel cream.

For entrees,

- Rita selected Adriatic Seafood Brodetto, black bass, snapper, mullet, calamari, clams, prawns, mussels, halibut, scallops;
- Debbie enjoyed Under The Sea, red king prawns, lobster, octopus, halibut, maitakes, foie gras, quinoa, Parmesan dashi;
- Bob tried the Sardinian Ricotta cavetelli, San Marzano tomatoes, basil, pecorino gran cru;
- I had the Black Bass, lemon, black olive salt, salsa verde, fennel aioli. I also had a half order of Spaghetti and tomato sauce (which was not on the menu, but delivered without a whimper).

For dessert we shared Ricotta Bomboloni, burnt honey gelato. The restaurant also delivered a small birthday cake. (It was my birthday.)

At lunch a few days later, Mary Beth and I started with the Colors of the Garden salad. Debbie and Steve chose Burrata of Buffalo Mozzarella, baby artichokes, squash blossoms, radish, pesto of basil Genovese.

For the entrée Debbie and Steve selected Fiola Mare “Lobster roll,” Maine lobster, spicy Calabrese mayo, pickled cucumbers, basil, potato bun. Mary Beth and I opted for one of the lunch specials, a Jumbo Lump Crab Cake. (The menu offers the option of one or two crab cakes, but one was sufficient.)

We decided to share two desserts: Baba al Maraschino, vanilla crème, Amarena cherry, toasted Marcona almonds; and Ricotta Bomboloni. In addition, the restaurant delivered a third treat, “Marchesi” amedei chocolate terrine, mint, Sicilian pistachio.

The restrooms are to the left as you enter the restaurant. The door is cream colored with a dark glass window covering half of it with the word “Gentleman” written across the glass. The floor is covered with large white, with design, tiles in square and rectangular shapes. The walls are covered to about waist height with relatively small white rectangular tiles. The rest of the walls to the ceiling are painted off white.

Immediately to the left as you enter there is a large wooden shelf with two sunken white ceramic wash basins. There is a mirror above each. Next, there are

two wall hanging urinals with a marble-like wall between them that goes from the floor to top of head height. The urinals are of the new Touch-Free, Hygienic, Water-free variety.

There is a commode room with full door and a single white ceramic commode.

We left dinner with questions about the service. Our server was not particularly attentive. She was busy with a number of other tables, but it struck me that she was not fully trained. (Debbie thought she was more attentive to the table of six next to us.)

On our second visit, conceding that the restaurant was not particularly busy, our serving person was as good as any that I can remember anywhere and better than most.

Fiola Mare is open for dinner seven nights a week, lunch Tuesday-Friday, and brunch on Saturday and Sunday.

There is valet parking separate from the valet parking available at the main entrance of Washington Harbor.

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POPPABOX
1928 I Street NW
Washington, DC 20006
202-331-1111
www.Poppabox.com

If you have ever pined for a scrambled egg sandwich in which waffles are used instead of bread, or you like your waffles with peanut butter, grape jelly & bananas, your prayers have been answered.

In addition to a range of waffle dishes and waffle sandwiches, there are Poppa Boxes: a variety of rice (plain or fried) dishes such as Teriyaki-Style with Shrimp Teriyaki mixed vegetables and rice and Poppa's Wraps. There are also vegetarian options.

I ordered a Poppa Box with fried rice, green salad, 3 pieces of California roll, and Shrimp Teriyaki.

While there are 18 seats at tables for 2 that can be reconfigured for larger groups, this is a take-out haven.

And the line moves. I arrived at 1:04 p.m. on a weekday. I stood in line for 3 minutes before reaching the counter where I placed my order, 1:07 p.m. My number was called to pick up my completed order at 1:13 p.m.

The restroom was Out Of Order the day I was there.

Poppabox is open for breakfast, lunch, and a little more. Catering is available.

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A Guest Book

For my most recent birthday, a group of friends gave me a very special gift in response to my reviews of restaurant restrooms. They gave me:

Bathroom
Guest Book
Please Sign in While Sitting Down

There are spaces to record “Memorable Moments,” “Additional Sentiments,” “Bathroom Doodle,” “Date and length of visit,” and a “Report card” in which various aspects of the restroom can be given A-F grades.

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