

*Mike Berman's*

# WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 126

June 29, 2013

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**State of the Nation**

The NBC/WSJ [6/2/13] found that 59% of Americans believe that things are on the wrong track in this country. The same result was reported by the CBS/NYT [6/4/13].

24% are satisfied with the way things are going in this country. This is down from the 33% recorded in November 2012. [Gallup 4/13]

For the month of May 2013, “unemployment” stands at 7.6%, up slightly from April 2013, when the rate was 7.5%. However, this number does not include people who are working part-time, but want full-time employment. Nor does it include those who have not looked for work in the last four weeks. When those folks are added, we get an unemployed/underemployed number that is 13.8% for May 2013. [U.S. BLS]

Following is the May data for 2009 – 2013.

	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>
Unemployed	9.4	9.6	9.0	8.2	7.6
Unemployed +	16.4	16.6	15.8	14.8	13.8

From mid- 2009 until June 2013, at least 60% of Americans have been at least somewhat concerned that they or someone in their family might be out of work and looking for a job within the next year. The number having that view rose to 66% in mid-2012, but returned to 61% this month. [CBS/NYT 6/13]

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During the period 2009-2011, the first two years of the recovery, wealth inequality in America grew. The wealthiest 7% saw their net household net worth grow by 28%, and their aggregate share of total household wealth grow from 56% to 63%. The 93% in the lowest net household income category saw their net worth decline by 4%.

These changes were likely driven by the fact that wealthier households have their assets “concentrated” in stocks and bonds, which rallied during this period, while “less affluent” households have more of their wealth in the value of their homes. That market did not rally during this period. [Pew]

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Women continue to earn less than men and there has not been much change in recent years. On average, women earn 77cents for every \$1 earned by a man. The disparity ranges from D.C., where women earn 90 cents for every dollar earned by a man, to Wyoming, where women earn 67 cents for every \$1 earned by a man. [AARP 6/13]

The following are examples of disparities in pay:

Women's percentage of men's pay

Property, real estate and community service managers	60.6%
Personal finance advisors	61.3%
Loan officers	61.6%
Insurance sales agents	64.4%
Financial managers	65.9%
Marketing and sales managers	67.9%
Real estate brokers and sales agents	68.1%
Securities, commodities & financial service agents	69.7%
Chief Executive	69%
Education administrators	69.3%

[MSN Money]

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16% of those aged 18-29 do not have credit cards, up from 8% in 2008.

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There are 41,810 zip codes in the United States. California has the most zip codes, with 2,602m and Rhode Island has the fewest, with 90 zip codes. [AARP 6/13]

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In May and June, Gallup reported the following:

- 48% of small businesses think the Affordable Care Act is bad for them
  - Only 13% of small business owners think the Act will improve the quality of healthcare
- The average age U.S. retirees say they actually retired is now age 61, up from age 59 in 2003.
- No surprise, as people get older they are increasingly worried about whether they will have enough money for retirement. 72% of those aged 50-64; 68% of those aged 30-49; and 52% of those aged 18-29 share this view.

- 46% say they will have enough money to live comfortably in retirement, while an equal number -- 47% -- say they will not have sufficient funds. Ten years ago, 59% thought they would have sufficient funds in retirement.
- 35% of adult workers believe they will have to continue working past retirement , while 40% say that they will do so as a matter of choice.
- A work-sponsored pension plan will be a major source of retirement income for 55% of households that make \$50,000 or more a year, while only 27% of those making less than that amount say they can rely on such pensions. Of those in the lower income group, 73%, expect to rely on Social Security.
- Only 52% of U.S. adults have money invested in stocks. 65% claimed stock ownership in 2007.
- 23% say they have confidence in newspapers. This is down from a high of 51% in 1979.
- 72% think that “the state of moral values” in the country is getting worse, and 77% believe that religion is losing its influence on American life.
- Nonwhites have more confidence than whites in the Presidency (54%- 29%), Congress (21% to 8%), and the U.S. Supreme Court (40% to 34%).

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Americans are evenly divided, 48% to 48%, on whether government in general should do more, or whether it is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals.

31% are generally optimistic about our system of government and how well it works. Other than in early 2011, this is the lowest percentage of Americans to hold this positive view in surveys going back to 1974.

29% are pessimistic about the government and how it works. This is the largest percentage recorded for the same survey question going back to 1974.  
[NBC/WSJ 6/13]

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Only 42% of those in the United States see climate change as a major threat to the country. Most of the rest of the world sees it differently, including our neighbors to the north. 54% of Canadians, 54% of Europeans, 54% of Africans, 56% of Asian/Pacificers, and 65% of those in Latin America believe that climate change is a major threat to their countries. [Pew 6/13]

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In a survey taken two weeks before the Supreme Court decisions on the Voting Rights Act and same gender marriage, the job being done by the Supreme Court was disapproved by 48% of Americans. The last time disapproval was this high was in June 2005.

Approval of the Court is also 48%. As recently as one year ago, approval stood at 53%, disapproval at 43%.

The only time since 2000 in which approval did not exceed disapproval was also in 2005. [CNN/ORG 6/13]

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### **A Big Step For Equality**

Earlier this week, the U.S. Supreme court handed down **two** decisions that represent another step forward for marriage equality.

First, the Court declared as unconstitutional Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act. (Section 2 of the Act was not challenged. It provides that States that do not recognize same gender marriage do not have to recognize such marriages even though they are legal in another State.)

The net result of this decision is that same gender couples who are married under the laws of particular States are entitled to receive the same benefits that opposite gender couples receive.

There are some 1138 places in Federal law where one form of right, benefit, or spousal protection is available to married people. (About a dozen of these benefits are particularly important.) However, because certain rights are based on

the place where a marriage is celebrated and others are based on the domicile of the persons seeking the benefits, not all of these benefits will be available to all married same gender couples.

If a same gender couple is married in Massachusetts and continues to live there, all of the benefits will be available to them. However, if that same couple, after being married in Massachusetts moves to Pennsylvania, which does not permit same gender marriage, certain of the benefits will not be available to them.

One such benefit that is based on domicile is spousal benefits under the Social Security Act. Another example relates to the filing of joint Federal tax returns. A same gender couple that is married in a State that recognizes gay marriage can file a joint return. If that same couple moves to a State that does not recognize their marriage they are not able to file a joint return.

It will take a while before the Administration is able to sort out which benefits fall into which class. That effort has begun.

The second decision was rendered in the so-called Prop 8 case. In California, same gender marriage had been stopped by a public referendum. That referendum was challenged in Federal court. The Federal District Court threw out the result of the referendum.

The State government chose not to appeal the District Court decision. The Supreme Court ruled that the parties who brought the law suit, and who had prevailed at the appellate court level, did not have standing to bring the suit. Chief Justice Roberts wrote, as part of the decision in that case, "We have never before upheld the standing of a private party to defend the constitutionality of a state statute when state officials have chosen not to....We decline to do so for the first time here."

Same gender marriages will resume shortly in California. The decision does not affect the laws of any other State.

Thirteen States and the District of Columbia have legalized same gender marriages. Ten States allow civil unions/partnerships. Thirty-five States ban same gender marriages, including some States which do permit civil unions.

[A note: Periodically there is an example of how the effort and energy of a single person can make a great difference. The Prop 8 case is one such example. While

the effort to overturn Prop 8 involved many people, including some outstanding lawyers, one person started the effort that produced this result. That person is Chad Griffin, who at that time was living in California, and subsequently became the President of the Human Rights Campaign. ]

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### **Increasingly, the States are in charge**

Real management of the country is moving from Washington, D.C. to the States and various local jurisdictions. The inability of the Congress to get anything of consequence done, and the increasing disfunction of the Executive Branch, have led Americans to the conclusion that they cannot look to the Federal government to solve the problems they face in their daily lives.

54% of Americans believe that the Federal government has too much power, while only 8% say it has too little. [Gallup 5/13]

78% think they can trust the government in Washington only some of the time. [NYT/CBS 6/13]

In 2001, at the time of 9/11, 82% of Americans had a favorable view of the Federal government. Today only 28% express a favorable view.

A year ago 51% of Democrats had a favorable view of the Federal government. Today that number has dropped to 41%, the first time it has dropped below 50% during Obama's tenure. Among Independents, 27% have a favorable view of the Federal government; and among Republicans, only 13% have a favorable view of the Federal government.

On the other hand, 57% of Republicans, 59% of Independents, and 56% of Democrats have a favorable view of State government; and 67% of Democrats, 63% of Republicans, and 60% of Independents have a favorable view of local government.

It's no surprise that Republicans tend to be more positive about State government where Republicans are in total control, and Democrats are more positive about State government where their kindred souls are in control. [Pew 4/13]

At the present time, Republicans dominate State governments. They control the governor's office in 30 States; the 28 State senates; and 29 State house chambers. In 24 States the governor's office, State senate, and State house are all under Republican control.

Here are the details.

### **Governors**

30 Republicans

20 Democrats

### **State Senate**

28 Republican Chambers

20 Democratic Chambers

1 Split Chamber (Virginia)

1 Non-Partisan Chamber (Nebraska)

1,024 Republican State Senators

890 Democratic State Senators

49 Non-Partisan State Senators

4 Independent State Senators

5 Vacant State Senate Seats

### **State House**

29 Republican Chambers

20 Democratic Chambers

1 State without a lower house (Nebraska)

2,794 Republicans

2,581 Democrats

15 Independents

8 third Party members

18 Vacant State House Seats

### **Governor, Senate, and House**

24 States governed by Republicans

13 States governed by Democrats

4 States governed by a Democratic executive and lower house with a Republican upper house

4 States governed by a Republican executive with Democrats running both houses of legislature



3 States governed by a Democratic executive with Republicans running both houses of legislature  
1 State governed by a Republican executive and lower house with a Democratic upper house  
1 State with a Republican governor with a non-partisan, unicameral legislature

There are 3,818 Republican State Legislators and 3,471 Democratic State Legislators.

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## **Technology**

[A note: The ubiquity of email has been established once and for all. Earlier this week I was exchanging emails with a new mother. Jokingly, I asked whether the new baby had its own email address. Thirty seconds later I received the baby's email address.]

The use of email in our daily lives as a partial replacement for the telephone leads to some differing attitudes among Americans. While the issue of National Security Agency surveillance is still developing in the minds of Americans, a recent survey found that 56% of Americans find it "acceptable" for the government to track phone records, while 41% find it unacceptable. However, when it comes to the monitoring of everyone's email, 52% disagree and 45% agree.

Furthermore, some 62% say it is important to "investigate possible terrorist threats," even though those efforts may intrude on personal privacy. 34% disagree. This reflects little change from 2006, when 65% expressed this point of view and 32% disagreed.

Age plays a significant role in an individual's point of view about these questions. 60% of those 18-29 years of age think the release of classified information by Edward Snowden "serves the public interest." Only 36% of those 65 and older share that view. 50% of those under 29 years of age think the government should not pursue a criminal case against Snowden. 55% of those 65+ think such a case should be pursued. [PEW 6/6-9 and 6/11-16/13]

Reflecting the fact that public opinion is still evolving, a Gallup survey taken June 10-11 found that 53% of adults disapprove of the Federal government

acquiring records from telephone and internet companies in order to compile telephone call and internet communication logs.

In yet a third survey, 50% of those 18-29, and 62% of those 50+, are mostly negative about the collection of various kinds of information by “businesses, law enforcement, government, individuals and other groups.” [Nat Journal 5/29-6/1]

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Age-based usage of the Internet is demonstrated in a variety of ways. Here is another. 73% of those 18-29 years of age oppose allowing each State to collect sales tax on purchases its residents make over the Internet. Only 46% of those 65 and over express that view. [Gallup 6/13]

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51% of Americans believe that the “laws covering the sale of guns should be made more strict.” Since 1994, those supporting stricter gun laws have ranged from a high of 59% in November 1994 to a low of 39% in April 2012. In April of this year 54% supported stricter laws.

56% think it is not likely that the President and Congress will pass laws that make significant changes in gun policy. Yet, 69% believe that the Congress should pass a law that expands background checks for gun purchases. [CBS/NYT 6/13]

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For the second year in a row, the “Bad News Babes,” a softball team composed of women who are members of the media, defeated the “Congressional Women’s” team, 11-8.

The Congressional team was led by Rep. Debbie Wasserman Shultz (D-Florida), Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and Rep. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV).

The media team was led by Amy Walter of the Cook Political Report and Brianna Keilar, White House correspondent for CNN.

Pamela Ryckman (author of “Stiletto Network”), writing in the Washington Post, said, “While their male counterparts remain divided along party lines – the

annual Congressional Baseball Game, which includes almost all men, pits Republicans against Democrats – the softball team is a bipartisan effort. “

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## President Obama

The public’s grade for the job President Obama is doing (as found by Gallup) is 47%/46%. This is better than 2 of the 5 previous two-term Presidents at this point in their second term. The list of 6 follows:

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Eisenhower	63	23 (7/2/57)
Reagan	58	37 (6/10/85)
Clinton	55	36 (6/26/97)
<u>Obama</u>	47	46 (6/16/13)
G Bush (II)	46	51 (6/30/05)
Nixon	44	45 (6/25/73)

<u>Date</u>	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>	<u>CNN/ORC</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>
June 2013	48/47%	xxx	45/54% *	47/43%
May 2013	xxx	51/45%	53/45%	xxx
Apr 2013	47/48%	50/45% *	51/47%	47/45%
Mar 2013	xxx	50/46%	47/50%	45/46% (CBS)
Feb 2013	50/45%	xxx	xxx	xxx
Jan 2013	52/44%	55/41%	55/43%	51/41%
<u>Apr 2012</u>	49/46%	50/45%	49/48%	48/42%

\* Latest survey in this line

By 53% to 44%, Americans have a favorable opinion of Obama.  
[Bloomberg 6/13]

In June, the NBC/WSJ survey found 49% disapproving of Obama’s performance on the economy. It has been in this range since January 2010. 46% currently approve of his performance in this area.

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>
June 2013	46%	49%
Apr 2013	47%	50%
Feb 2013	44%	51%
Jan 2013	49%	48%
Jan 2012	45%	50%
Jan 2011	45%	50%
Jan 2010	43%	49%
Jan 2009	56%	31%

64% are dissatisfied with the state of the U.S. economy today, while 36% are satisfied. On its face, this is a pretty negative picture. But in fact, looking back over Obama's tenure, this is the highest level of satisfaction and the lowest level of dissatisfaction recorded. When Obama took office the level of dissatisfaction was at 92%. As recently as January of 2013 the dissatisfaction level was recorded at 72%.

Conversely, the level of satisfaction is the highest it has been since Obama took office. [NBC/WSJ 6/13]

Obama's performance on foreign policy continues to be rated positively by 45% to 39%. His highest rating was recorded in June 2009. [NYT/CBS 6/13]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>
June 2013	45%	39%
Apr 2013	45%	38%
Feb 2013	48%	31%
Jan 2013	49%	36%
Jan 2012	48%	35%
Jan 2011	46%	32%
Jan 2010	49%	38%
Feb 2009	50%	15%

[NBC/WSJ6/13]

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49% disapprove of Obama's handling of immigration, with 39% approving. In February, 41% disapproved of his handling of this issue, while 46% approved. [NYT/CBS 6/13]

58% disapprove of the way Obama has handled the IRS matter. [Gallup 6/13]

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Approval of the job Obama is doing, through his term to date, has averaged 30 percentage points ahead of the job approval of Congress during the same period. This compares to the 12-point spread achieved by George W. Bush; the 18- point spread achieved by Bill Clinton; and the 39-point spread achieved by George H.W. Bush. [Gallup 6/13]

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The June 11-13 CNN survey shows a drop of 9 percentage points for Obama on the statement “is honest and trustworthy,” from 58% to 49%. In February 2009, Obama’s score on this item was 74%. Since November 2009 it has ranged from 61% to 58% in May 2013.

Many, including CNN commentators, have cautioned that this is only a single survey, suggesting that this drop has not been confirmed.

However, this drop in “trustworthiness” previously showed up in the May 30-June 2 survey by the NBC/WSJ. In that survey, Obama is described as “being honest and straight forward” by 42% of the respondents. This was a drop of 7% since January 2013, and a 22% drop from a high of 64% that the survey found in April 2009.

Furthermore, in the same NBC/WSJ survey, an average of 57% think that the Administration’s handling of Benghazi, the subpoena of phone records reports of national security leaks, and the IRS targeting of conservative groups “raises doubts about the overall honesty and integrity of the Obama administration.”

In addition, when asked whether President Obama is personally responsible for the doubts raised about the Administration above, an average of 38% found him “totally/mainly responsible”

- 43% relating to Benghazi
- 37% relating to phone records and security leaks
- 33% relating to the IRS

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## **The Congress**

83% disapprove of the job being done by Congress. [CNN/ORG 6/13]  
The job that Democrats in Congress are doing has a disapproval rating of 60% and the job Republicans are doing is disapproved by 67%. [FOX 6/13]

Gallup, which has Congressional disapproval at 78%, reports that the reasons for this level of disapproval are “party gridlock”--28%, “not getting anything done” -- 21%, and “caring more about politics than the country” -- 11%. [6/13]

Only 10% have confidence in Congress. This is the lowest score ever recorded by Gallup. As recently as 2004, the confidence level was at 29%. [Gallup 6/13]

While Congressional behavior is panned by many, it is the case that “respondents rated a member of Congress far more favorably if the lawmaker put the interests of his or her district or state over those of the country as a whole.” [Study by David Doherty of Loyola University of Chicago, reported by Amy Walter, Cook Political Report 6/20]

By 45% to 42%, adults prefer a Congress controlled by Democrats as opposed to a Congress controlled by Republicans. [NBC/WSJ 6/13]

One disquieting factor for Democrats is that the issues on which the Administration is focused, such as gun control, immigration, same sex marriage, climate change, and implementation of the Affordable Care Act, do not provide much of a platform on which Democratic candidates can stand.

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### THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats	52
Republicans	46
Independents	2

Congressman Ed Markey easily won the special election to fill the Massachusetts U.S. Senate seat vacated by John Kerry. Early on, various

Republican-oriented political organizations -- PACs and 501(c)(4)s -- decided that capturing this seat was too high a hill to climb, and did not engage with financial resources on behalf of Gabriel Gomez, the Republican nominee.

Two Democratic Senate seats have moved from Toss-Up to Leaning Republican, South Dakota and West Virginia. Two additional Democrat seats have moved from Leaning Democrat to Toss-Up, Alaska and North Carolina.

Looking at the six Democratic Toss-Up races, Montana will move to Leaning Democrat when former governor Brian Schweitzer announces his candidacy for the Democratic nomination.

Assuming that South Dakota and West Virginia do end up in the Republican camp in 2014, Republicans have to pick up four more seats. A steep, but not impossible, hill to climb. Betting among those who spend time gaming the election is that the Republicans are like to have a pickup of three in 2014.

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\* Italics denotes the retirement of a current member.

Safe Democrat(11)	Leaning Democrat(2)	TossUp(6)	Leaning Republican(4)	Safe Republican(12)
Colorado	<i>Michigan</i>	Alaska	<i>Georgia</i>	Alabama
Delaware	New Hamp.	Arkansas	Kentucky	Idaho
Hawaii		Louisiana	<i>So. Dakota</i>	Kansas
Illinois		<i>Iowa</i>	<i>West Virginia</i>	Maine
<i>Massachusetts</i>		<i>Montana</i>		Mississippi
Minnesota		No. Carolina		<i>Nebraska</i>
<i>New Jersey</i>				Oklahoma
New Mexico				So. Carolina
Oregon				So. Carolina
Rhode Island				Tennessee
Virginia				Texas
				Wyoming

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Seats not up in 2014	34	31
Safe in 2014	11	12
Leaning in 2012	2	4
Total	47	47

Toss-ups 6 (D)

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### THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Due to the redistricting of the 435 Congressional districts, completed in 2012, it is hard to divine a path that would lead to the Democrats retaking the House in this decade.

According to Politico (6/19), of the 435 Congressional districts

- 242 tilt toward Republicans
- 185 tilt toward Democrats

If you want a contrary view, WW suggests you review the recent Democracy Corps survey of likely 2014 voters in the 80 most competitive Congressional districts. [June 21,2013]

As it has for a very long time, WW regularly reprints and relies on the analysis of House races published by the “Cook Political Report.”

	<u>1/24/13</u>	<u>2/21/13</u>	<u>4/17/13</u>	<u>6/20/13</u>
Total Dem	201	201	201	201
Solid Dem	167	166	166	163
Likely Dem	17	18	18	18
Lean Dem	11	11	11	12
Toss-up	7	7	8	9
D	6	6	6	8
R	1	1	2	1
Lean GOP	7	10	10	10
Likely GOP	18	17	18	17
Solid GOP	208	206	204	206
Total GOP	234	234	234	234



“The Rothenberg Political Report” has also posted a report that deals with the entire House. [Thanks to the Rothenberg Report.]

	<u>3/12</u>	<u>4/19</u>	<u>6/14</u>
Total Democrat	201	200	194
Safe Democrat	176	176	177
D Favored	10	10	8
Lean D	6	6	9
Toss Up/Tilt D	6	6	5
Toss Up-D	3	2	3
Toss Up-R	2	3	1
Toss Up/Tilt R	5	5	5
Lean R	5	5	5
R Favored	13	13	10
Safe Republican	207	208	212
Total Republican	234	234	227

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## **Restaurants**

### **Washington DC**

**Matchbox**

**Zaytinya**

**Zengo**

**Range - Addendum**

matchbox

vintage pizza bistro

713 H Street NW

Washington, DC 20001

202-289-4441

[www.matchboxchinatown.com](http://www.matchboxchinatown.com)

This is another of the seemingly endless number of restaurants in Chinatown. I was there for a lunch meeting with two others on a weekday.

The restaurant is relatively narrow and operates on two levels. As you enter, just past the reception desk, there is a bar with high stools and a huge, live fire. To the right, up a half level, is a long dining area, including booths and tables.

While the restaurant had been described to me by the person recommending it as having great pizza, the menu is well beyond pizza, and includes appetizers, sandwiches, salads, entrees....and pizza.

One of our party had “honey-miso salmon” with honey-mustard miso, tempura Shiitake, rice noodles, spinach, and carrots. The second person, who had been there before, ordered a small pizza, the toppings for which I failed to note.

I started with a “matchbox chopped salad” with diced tomato, crispy bacon, red onions, pasta ringlets, creamy herb vinaigrette. I followed that with a small “veggie pizza” with roasted garlic, pesto, oven-dried tomato, artichokes. Ordinarily, that particular pizza comes with pecorino Romano and mozzarella. Shortly after taking our order the serving person returned to say that, because I had asked that the cheese be left off the pizza, they wanted me to know that there was a small amount of cheese in the pesto.

One of the nice features of the matchbox menu is that there are several appetizers and salads, and all of the pizzas can be ordered in a smaller or larger size.

All of the folks with whom you interact, from the reception desk through the serving staff, are receptive, attentive and helpful.

Reservations are a good idea.

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Zaytinya  
701 9<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
202-628-0800  
[www.Zaytinya.com](http://www.Zaytinya.com)

I went to Zaytinya with Debbie, Rachel, Steve, Max, and Cobby. This was my third visit to Zaytinya and my first on a Saturday night.

It is a large restaurant, with floor-to-ceiling windows on two walls, and therefore, is well-lighted, day and night. The main dining area is on the entrance level and there is a balcony at one end. On the night we were there, there was a

very long table running down the center of the main floor, which looked to seat between 35 and 40 people. It was not clear whether this was a communal table or one large party.

There is a very long bar along one wall, on a slightly raised floor, which seats 25-30 people on high stools, and another 20 on high tables with stools, seating four each. When the weather permits or encourages, there is an outside area with multiple four tops.

The restaurant seats about 220 without including the outside plaza, which appears to seat another 100. On this night about 900 people were served.

We had a 6:30 reservation and were quickly seated. I had a view of the front door and reception desk, and from about 7 p.m. and into the night there was a steady stream of new folks milling around the desk. The folks taking care of them and seating them were extraordinarily gracious, even when new guests were piled around them.

The crowd ranges from quite young to those of us on the older side. Dress is absolutely casual. The restaurant is rather noisy, but not cacophonous.

All of the dishes on the extensive menu are small, except for a few “family style” offerings on a special menu. Our waiter suggested that we order three dishes for each of the four adults, and two for each of the younger people in our party.

When dining at small-dish restaurants with a large party there is always a certain amount of confusion, as people sing out their order and then the serving person tries to get everything right. Having experienced this at other restaurants on previous occasions, I brought with me a copy of the restaurant’s menu from its website. (Menus tend to be more current on the restaurant website than the menus on Open Table.)

We went around the table and as each person announced what they would like to have I checked off the item on the menu. When the serving person came to take our order I gave him a copy of my list with a request that it be returned. It was clear that he enjoyed taking the order this way.

We ordered 15 dishes from various sections of the menu and then an additional serving of Baba Ghannouge.

Spreads – Baba Ghannouge (egg plant), Tzatziki (Greek yogurt), Taramosalata (cured carp roe).

Soups & Salads – Fattoush (chopped vegetables) and Beet Salata.

Vegetable Mezze – Crispy Brussels Afelia, Bantijjan Bil Laban (eggplant), Roasted Cauliflower, Mercimek Koftese (red lentil patties), Elies Tis Elladas (assorted olives), Mushroom Couscous, Falafel (chickpea fritters), Piyaz (warm giant beans), Patates Tiganites Me Yiaqorti (potatoes).

Meat & Poultry Mezze – Shish Taouk (chicken), Knisa Lamb Chops.

Freshly made pita breads were brought to the table throughout the dinner.

We had no room for dessert.

The dishes came out 1, 2 or 3 at a time, in the approximate order they were listed on the menu. The service was quick and the serving person who took care of us was excellent.

As you enter the men's room, to the far right, tucked into a corner, are two different height, white, ceramic, wall-attached urinals. They are separated from three completely enclosed, wooden door, commode rooms by a floor-to-ceiling wall. The third of the commode rooms also includes a washbasin and is fully equipped for handicapped use.

Across the room, and to the left of the door as you come in, is a long, white, square ceramic washbasin with three separate hand washing stations.

The floor is covered with large tan colored tiles. Some of the walls are covered with large gray tiles and other walls are painted a dark brown.

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Zengo  
781 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
202-393-2929

[www.richardsndoval.com/zengodc/](http://www.richardsndoval.com/zengodc/)

Debbie and I went to Zengo with Virginia and Tom. The restaurant is a two story affair. On the main floor, as you enter, there is a reception desk near the front door. Proceed into the restaurant and there is a bar with high stools and a

number of small, tall tables. The principal dining area is up a long flight of stairs. Happily, there is an elevator.

The second floor seats up to 178 people. There is a bar with a dozen high stools, a 12-person communal table, and a private glass-walled dining room that seats up to 20 people. Along one wall are half circle banquets with tables that seat up to six people. On the far opposite wall, there is a long banquette with tables and opposing chairs. On the front wall, there are two half circle indentations each of which holds a table for four people. The rest of the second floor is filled with 2, 4 and 5-person tables.

The menu is described as Latin-Asian cuisine. The 42 item menu is broken down into Cerviches & Tiraditos, Sushi Rolls, Dim Sum & Antojitos, Soups and Salads, Main Dishes, and Sides.

A person could easily make a complete dinner without ever getting to the Main Dish category.

We shared a Lobster Roll, Shrimp Vegetable Potstickers, Salt and Pepper Shrimp Tacos, and two orders of Thai Shrimp Lettuce Wraps. Debbie and Tom shared Tagalog Style Churrasco Steak. Virginia ordered Cedar Paper Salmon. I opted for the Chipotle Miso Glazed Black Cod.

The two people working the reception desk were particularly welcoming and friendly. The serving staff was attentive and helpful. When we completed our order our server let us know that, because the kitchen is relatively small, each dish which is part of our total order would come to the table when it was ready without any effort to deliver all of the starters or all of the entrees at the same time.

The crowd is relatively young and it is pretty noisy throughout the restaurant.

The rest rooms are located at the far end of the restaurant. The entry to the men's room does not have a door. Instead, at the opening there are a series of thin metal chains which hang from the ceiling to the floor which you simply push through. There are three walled areas that are completely enclosed except at the top of the doors. In one area there is a white, ceramic wall-hanging urinal. In the second there is a standard white ceramic commode. The third is a particularly well-appointed area for those who may need special assistance in the form of railings. In addition to the white ceramic commode, there is a white, ceramic

square wash basin.

In the rest of the room there are two round, pedestal, ceramic wash basins, accompanied by relevant mirrors, and a particularly attractive round ceramic waste basket.

The floor and the walls, up to about four feet high, are covered with large black tiles. The balance of the walls are painted a kind of dull orange.

There is valet parking.

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**Addendum to the review of Range that was included  
in the last Washington Watch.**

RANGE  
5335 Wisconsin Avenue NW  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20015  
202-803-8020  
[www.voltrange.com](http://www.voltrange.com)

A reader noted that the review of Range did not include a recitation of what Gail, Rob, Debbie and I ate. Nor did it include the usual rest room review. I have no idea why I did not include this information.

This menu is structured differently than most in that, rather than organizing choices by major categories (appetizers, salads, entrees, desserts), the menu is divided as follows: Raw Bar (Shellfish, Crudos), Bakery, Salumeria (Hams, Terrines, Pates and Sausage, Cheeses), Cold Kitchen, Pasta, Wood Oven (Wood Oven, Pizza), Wood Grill, Pan Roasted, Accompaniments (Starch and Grains, Vegetables and Legume), Specials.

From the Raw Bar, Gail and Rob ordered Octopus; from the Bakery we ordered for the table a “bakers basket and spreads,” which is a sample of all the breads and spreads that are offered.

From Salumeria, I ordered “chicken liver pudding, lavash.” From the Cold Kitchen, Gail ordered “fennel, blood orange, arugula, parmesan; Debbie and Rob

ordered “kale caesar, whitmore farm egg;” I ordered little gem lettuce, hobbs bacon, blue cheese.”

From the Wood Oven, Rob ordered “beef marrow bones, pine nuts, golden raisin.” From the Wood Grill, Gail and Rob ordered “Cumberland Valley lamb rack, olives.” From Pan Roasted, I ordered “whole rabbit roulade, yellowfoot mushrooms.” And, from Accompaniments, I ordered “cauliflower, golden raisin, za’atar, almond.”

We did not order any of the desserts, which are broken down into Candy Counter, Sweets, Ice Cream, and Sorbet.

While each of us did order one or more dishes, there was an inordinate amount of sharing.

The men’s room is as bright and shiny as the rest of the restaurant, and of ample size. The most unusual feature is that the door at the entrance to the restroom is glass, through which one can see into the restroom. To the right, as you enter, is a completely enclosed commode, next to which there are several wall-hanging urinals, and then another fully enclosed commode. On the other side of the room are three wash basins.

[This review is less detailed than usual because there were others in the restroom at the same time, and I was unable to do the usual which is to take photographs.]

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**Las Vegas**  
**Jean Georges Steak House**  
**Nobu**  
**American Fish**

Debbie and I were in Las Vegas with Jay and Rita, Wolf and Lynn, Stan and Julia, and Ron and Simma. Rita was our trip director, with periodic assists from Stan. We had dinner at the following three restaurants. None of these restaurants are inexpensive. Group lunches were at various of the more casual restaurants in the Aria Hotel.

Dress at the various restaurants was relatively casual, although at each there were folks who were more dressed up.

Jean Georges Steak House  
Aria Hotel  
Las Vegas, Nevada

Through a certain amount of subterfuge Rita arranged for the group to get a perfectly-sized private room. The centerpiece of the room was two chandeliers, each of which were constructed of utensils, knives, forks, and spoons hanging from an oval frame.

As with a couple of other meals, one or more members of our group chose two appetizers/salads rather than an appetizer and an entree.

Wolf – Crispy Sushi Sampler, Tuna Tartare and Burrata Mozzarella ; Lynn – Crispy Sushi Sampler and Slowly Cooked Salmon; Rita – Jumbo Shrimp Cocktail and New York Strip; Jay – Caesar Salad and Crunchy Baked Organic Chicken; Simma – Caesar Salad and Slowly Cooked Salmon; Ron – Caesar Salad and Wagyu Filet Mignon; Julia – Roasted Chilean Sea Bass and Sautéed Spinach; Stan – Colorado Lamb Chops; Debbie – Warm Spring Beets and New York Strip; Mike – Spring Pea Soup, Roasted Chilean Sea Bass, and Mashed Potatoes.

A variety of desserts were selected that were shared by all.

Wolf proclaimed all three dishes he ordered as excellent individually and in combination. Someone else in our party called the meal “fantastic.”

The restaurant offered one 6 oz steak for \$270 but no one ordered it.

The service was attentive and in all other ways excellent.

The men’s’ room was quite interesting. As you enter there are three circular washbasins on individual stands in the middle of the room. To the right are two totally glass-enclosed commode rooms with colorful designs on the doors. To the left are two wall-hanging urinals with a partial wall between them. The commodes, urinals and washbasins are black ceramic. The walls are composed of relatively thin, multi-inch tiles in a variety of colors, including yellow, black, grey, green, and orange.

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Nobu  
Nobu Hotel  
Caesars Palace  
3570 South Las Vegas Blvd  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89109  
702-866-1102

The restaurant is very large, but broken up in a variety of ways. There are a number of round tables that seat up to ten people, most of which are in round alcoves. There is one alcove which has a half circle table, in the middle of which is the chef who prepares the dishes selected for the group. There are a variety of two, four and six-person tables. There is a long counter that faces one side of the open kitchen at which a full menu is served. There is also a long, traditional bar where drinks are served.

Noticing a young man at dinner with seven women at a nearby table, Jay decided to introduce himself. They invited him to pull up a chair and join them, which he did. It turns out that this was a bachelorette dinner for one of the young women, with the young man as the host.

The food comes out one dish at a time.

There was a lazy susan in the middle of the table on which various dishes were placed. Rita and Lynn chose most of the items which were shared by all. Their choices included Edamame, Shishito Peppers, Yellowtail Jalapeno; Tempura vegetables (beans, mushrooms); Squid 'Pasta' with Light Garlic and veggies; Rock Shrimp Creamy Spicy Sauce, Rock Shrimp with Ponzu sauce; Jalapeno & Creamy Spicy Aioli; Black Cod Miso; Artichoke salad, Field greens with Masuhisa dressing, Kelp salad (aka seaweed); and Kampachi with salsa. Each of the dishes was very tasty, with interesting spices.

When filled, as it was the evening we were there, the restaurant is quite noisy, but if your table is in one of the alcoves it is easy to hear others in your party.

The men's room is large, but quite plain. There are two commode rooms with partial metal walls and doors; two wall-hanging urinals with a partial metal wall between them; and two white, ceramic washbasins in a marble counter top. The floor is covered with very large white tiles. The walls are covered with very large grey tiles, to about six feet, with white paint above.

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American Fish  
Aria Hotel  
3730 Las Vegas Boulevard  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89158  
702-590-8610  
MichaelMina.net

The restaurant has several rows of booths, and then a variety of two, four, six, eight and ten-person tables. The ten of us were again seated at a round table.

There is a bar along one side, that is raised from the dining room floor. It seats 12-15 folks on high stools at the bar, and has a row of tall tables with stools located at the dining room edge of the bar area.

There is an open kitchen that is open to a corridor which carries a fair amount of traffic between serving people picking up orders and folks heading for the rest rooms.

The chef came by to greet us. Ron asked him which of the fish selections had come in that day and which had come in the day before....he told us.

A large plate of Crispy Fish Tostadas were delivered to the table as an unordered starter.

Again a number of people in our party opted to order two appetizers or other starters.

Lynn - Michael's Tomato Soup and Maryland Blue Crab Cake; (Lynn described the tomato soup as "amazing"); Wolf - Smoked Salmon and Michael's Ahi Tuna Tartare; Simma - American Fish Caesar and Maryland Blue Crab Cake; Ron - Michael's Ahi Tuna Tartare and Wreckfish (firm meaty white fish basted in Herb Olive oil); Rita - Michael's Ahi Tuna Tartare and Wreckfish; Jay - Michael's Tomato Soup and Mustard-Marinaded Black Cod; Julia - Shrimp & Grits and American Fish Caesar; Stan - Shrimp Gumbo and Michael's Ahi Tuna Tartare; Debbie - Maryland Crab Cake and Small Shellfish platter (her request to substitute a couple of items was accommodated in a routine fashion); Mike - Octopus Lomi-Lomi and Mustard-Marinaded Black Cod.

Rita also ordered Grilled Asparagus, Green Bean Casserole, and Gratin Tops (baked layers of crispy potato and parmesan) for the table.

For dessert, someone ordered plates of Beignets and various little cakes.

Again the service was first rate.

*Mike*

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