

Mike Berman's

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State of the Nation

In early August the NBC/WSJ poll found that 71% of us think the country is on the wrong track. In the last year the wrong track number has ranged from a low of 62% (9/13) to a high of 78% (10/13).

76% are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States. 2% are satisfied. [Gallup 8/14]

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The official BLS unemployment rate for July 2014 is 6.2%, up a point from the previous month, but still 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 12.2%. This is down from 13.9% a year ago. 2.9% of the work force has been unemployed for 15 weeks or more. This is about where it was in June, and 1% point lower than it was one year ago.

In the second week of August, Gallup found an unemployment rate of 6.3%. It also found an underemployment rate (unemployed + those working part-time, but wanting full time) of 15%, about the same as in mid-July.

Over the last six weeks the Gallup Job Creation Index has been at +28, with a blip upward to 29 in July. The index was at +22 one year ago.

2.54 million people continued to receive jobless benefits in the last week of July. [BLS]

There were 4.670 million unfilled jobs in the U.S. in the month of June, up from 4.58 million in May. So, there are about 2 unemployed people for each available job. However, these numbers do not take into account where the jobs are located and whether the unemployed have the qualifications required for the available jobs.

By 47% to 44%, Republicans in Congress are seen as more focused on job creation and growing the economy. This is quite different from a year ago when 50% thought Obama was more focused, while 39% had that view about Republicans. [Winston Group]

45% say they are spending more than they were a year ago. 18% say they are spending less. [Gallup 8/14]

One year ago, 29% of employed people in the United States were afraid that they might be laid off. Today that number is 19%. On reduction of benefits, their fears have dropped from 43% to 34%; on reduction of wages, from 31% to 24%.

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The most recent NBC/WSJ survey (8/14) provides a particularly vivid picture of what Americans think of America.

- * 76% are not confident that “life for our children’s generation will be better than it has been for us”
- * 62% are dissatisfied with America’s role in the world
- * 79% are dissatisfied with the political system
- * 64% of Americans are dissatisfied with the state of the U.S. economy
- * 50% say the economy is improving. About half of the 50% say the improvement is for all economic levels, while the other half say it is mostly for the highest economic level.

On each of the issues above, women and men are relatively the same in their views. However, there is a series of issues for which there is a significant gender split:

- * 52% of men believe America is a country where anyone can succeed.
37% of women share that view.
- * 54% of women believe we are still in a recession.
43% of men share that view.
- * 70% of women think that raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 would have a positive impact on the economy.
49% of men share that view.

- * 74% of women think that increasing taxes on the richest 1% would have a positive impact.
54% of men share that view.

A recent Annenberg study found that 65% of us believe that the greater challenges to this country come from things happening within, while 23% say the greater challenge comes from without. [7/15/14]

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In 2006, 91% of Americans said they felt free to choose what they wanted to do with their lives. Now only 79% of Americans express that sense of freedom. The United States now ranks 36th in a list of 120 countries in which Gallup asks the same question.

There has been a significant change in what Americans voluntarily describe as the most important problem facing the country today. In January the number one issue was

- “dissatisfaction with government/Congress/politicians; poor leadership/Corruption/Abuse of power” – 21%
- Immigration/Illegal aliens was tied for 8th – 3%

In June dissatisfaction with government was edged out by the

- Economy in general – 20%
- Immigration was tied for 6th – 5%

Then, in July “Immigration/Illegal aliens” jumped to #1 – 17%
“Dissatisfaction” was 2nd; the Economy was 3rd

Finally, in August “dissatisfaction” has returned to #1 – 18%

- Immigration is #2 – 15%

Unemployment has been 3rd or 4th on each of the lists

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Assessment of the Supreme Court remains relatively low, with 47% approving of the Court and 46% disapproving. This is about where the public’s

assessment of the Court has been for the past few years. As recently as late 2009 the Court's work was approved by 61%, while 28% disapproved. [Gallup 7/14]

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42% of us identify ourselves politically as Democratic/Leaning Democrat. This is the lowest Democratic identification that Gallup has found at this time in each of the last five mid-term election cycles.

40% identify politically as Republican/Leaning Republican. This is a lower number than any in the last five mid-term election cycles, except 2006 when it was also 40%.

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In 2004, the average cost of tuition and fees at private, nonprofit colleges and universities was \$18,950. From 2004 until 2014, the Consumer Price Index rose 26%. If tuition and fees only grew with the CPI, those costs would now be \$23,910. In fact, the average cost of tuition and fees at private, nonprofit colleges and universities is \$30,094 in 2014. A increase of nearly 59%. [Tuition numbers from the WSJ 8/16/14]

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President Obama

The public's grade on the job President Obama is doing (as found by Gallup 8/14-16) is 41% approval/53% disapproval.

Of the six most recent, two-term Presidents at this point in their second term, Obama's current approval rating continues to be better than Richard Nixon and is tied with George Bush II. He trails Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Dwight Eisenhower. The list of 6 follows:

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Reagan	61	27 (8/11/86)
Clinton	62	35 (8/23/98)
Eisenhower	56	27 (8/25/58)
<u>Obama</u>	42	51 (8/18/14)
G Bush (II)	42	54 (8/20/06)

Nixon 24 66 (8/5/74)

<u>Date</u>	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>	<u>CNN/ORC</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>
August 2014	40/54%	xxx	xxx	41/50% (CBS)
July 2014	xxx	xxx	42/55%	xxx
June 2014	42/53%	xxx	43/55%	40/54%
Mar 2014	41/54%	46/50%	43%/53%	43/50%
Jan 2014	43/51%	45/52%	45/51%	46/47% (CBS)
July 2013	45/50%	49/44%	xxx	48/45% (CBS)
Jan 2013	52/44%	55/41%	55/43%	51/41%

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53% disapprove of the job Obama is doing in handling the economy and 60% disapprove of the way he is handling foreign policy, while only 36% approve. The number disapproving his handling of foreign policy is the highest and the approval number the lowest recorded in the NBC/WSJ survey. One year ago, 49% disapproved and 41% approved. [NBC/WSJ 8/14]

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45% believe that Obama has gone too far in “expanding the power of the Presidency and the Executive Branch.” In 2006, 48% believed that George Bush had gone too far expanding the Presidency and the Executive Branch. 22% believe that Obama has not gone far enough. 14% had that view about Bush.

When he took office, 80% said they believed Obama was a “strong and decisive leader.” Now, 48% share that view, while 52% say that description does not apply to him.

57% do not think Obama can manage the government effectively. And folks are split 49%/49% on whether he is sincere in what he says. In January 2011, 65% thought he was sincere. [CNN/ORC 7/20/14]

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When it comes to how Americans “feel” about Obama, 47% say they have negative feelings and only 40% have positive feelings. This is the worst score he has had on this question during his tenure in office. [NBC/WSJ 6/14]

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The Congress

83% disapprove of the way that Congress is handling its job. 55% disapprove strongly. 13% approve of the job being done; 2% approve strongly. [Gallup 7/14]

In July, surveys conducted by Fox, Gallup, and CBS show that approval of the job being done by Congress ranges from 13-15% approval. Four surveys taken by The Economist/YouGov during July averaged 8.5% approval. The latter is down from an average 9.3% approval in three surveys taken during June.

19% of registered voters say that most Members of Congress deserve re-election. 50% think their own Member deserves re-election. [Gallup 8/14]

Among registered voters, 44% say they would prefer control by Republicans, while 43% prefer a Congress controlled by Democrats. This is another question on which there is a definite split between women and men. By 51% to 37% women prefer a Congress controlled by the Democrats, while by 52% to 35% men prefer a Republican controlled Congress. [NBC/WSJ 8/14]

In a mid-July Gallop survey, respondents were asked to volunteer what they would recommend to fix Congress. They responded

- 22% - Replace all Members
- 14% - Get along better
- 11% - Term Limits.

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Not since the 2002 election have so many incumbent Members of the House of Representatives run without opposition. Here are the numbers as reported by the National Journal:

2014	77 total	37R, 40D
2012	44 total	28R, 18D
2010	30 total	25R, 5D
2008	56 total	14R, 42D
2006	57 total	10R, 47D
2004	65 total	36R, 29D

2002	81 total	44T, 37D
2000	63 total	30%, 33D
1998	94 total	55R, 39D
1996	22 total	13R, 9D
1994	52 total	35R, 17D

In the 8 mid-term elections starting in 1982, there were 5 elections in which the sitting President had a late October Gallup rating of 50% or less (1982, 1986, 1994, 2006, and 2010). In each of those elections the President's Party lost Senate seats. (Courtesy Peter Fenn)

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The Senate

Entering the post-Labor Day, final lap of the 2014 election cycle, Republicans are almost certainly going to increase their membership in the 100-person U.S. Senate to 48 from the current 45. This prediction assumes that two Republican toss-up seats -- Georgia and Kentucky -- will stay in Republican hands, and that Montana, West Virginia, and South Dakota will join them.

The question becomes how many seats can they pick up from the 7 seats currently rated as toss-ups? Based on current "facts," two of those seats, Louisiana and Arkansas, are likely to end up in the Republican column. This would bring Republicans to an even 50, and require Vice President Joe Biden to spend a lot of time around the Senate chamber.

Two of the remaining five toss-up states -- Michigan and Colorado -- are most likely to end up in Democratic hands.

The question then becomes whether Republicans can pick up one seat from the races in Iowa, North Carolina, and Alaska.

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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)		Montana West Virginia South Dakota
Total	45	46

	<u>Toss-ups</u>	
7 Democrats		2 Republicans
Iowa		McConnell (KY)
Landrieu (LA)		Georgia
Hagan (NC)		
Pryor (AR)		
Michigan		
Begich (AK)		
Udall (CO)		

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Nothing of consequence is new in the contest for control of the House of Representatives. Republicans will maintain control. Based on the number of current Democratic seats in the Toss-Up column, it is possible, if not likely, that Republicans will add to their majority. (Cook Political Report is my bible here.)

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats 199
Republicans 233
Vacant 3 (2D/1R)

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Safe in 2014	160	205
Leaning	28 (2 GOP seat)	26 (includes 2 Democrat seats)

	<u>Toss Ups</u>	
13		3

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2016

Since the last edition of the Watch (early July), one Democrat and seven Republicans have been added to the list of people who have said they are thinking about running for President, or who have been talked about by others as potential candidates for the top office. The Republicans are Michelle Bachmann, Ben Carson, Mike Huckabee, John Huntsman, Joe Scarborough, Donald Trump, and Mitt Romney. The Democrat is Joe Manchin.

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton remains the one person who clears the field if she decides to run. Chatter at the moment is that Clinton might be headed toward a progressive (read liberal) opponent in the Democratic primary.

There is no front runner on the Republican side.

The numbers below are the average of two surveys reported in late July, CNN on July 27 and Fox on July 28. The two polls are in lock step with each other.

<u>Democrats</u>		<u>Republicans</u>	
Clinton	65.5%	Christie	11.5%
Biden	10	Paul	11.5
Warren	9.5	Perry	11.5
Cuomo	4.5	Bush	10
O'Malley	1.5	Ryan	10
		Cruz	8.5
		Rubio	7.5
		Walker	4.5
		Santorum	3

This is the longer list of potential contenders.

<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	Duval Patrick
Ted Cruz	Brian Schweitzer
Rick Santorum	Mark Warner
Rick Perry	Jay Nixon
Michelle Bachman	Jim Webb
Ben Carson	Bernie Sanders
Mike Huckabee	Joe Manchin
John Huntsman	
Joe Scarborough	
Donald Trump	
Mitt Romney	

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This and That

The Meaning of Words

Ever since my days growing up in Duluth, Minnesota, I have used two words that I found quite descriptive. It has now been brought to my attention that these two words have not been granted entry to any English language dictionary, the suggestion being that they are, therefore, not words. The words and their meaning follows:

Catsafranas – confused, mixed up, complicated
Difugalty (Difugalties) – a problem

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Restaurants

Washington DC

LA PIQUETTE

3714 Macomb Street NW
Washington, DC 20016
202-686-2015 (same as Le Zinc)

Debbie and I were with Florence, Peter, Margo, and Joe on our visit to La Piquette.

This location was previously Bistro Le Zinc, which was reviewed in the March 2013, Watch. The physicality of the restaurant has not changed, so here is how I described the restaurant then.

“The restaurant is fairly narrow. On the main level, as you come in, there are tables of various sizes along the right hand wall and several tables to the left, starting about half way into the restaurant. To the left there is a balcony several steps up where there are additional tables which can be combined into a single table for a large group.

“The men's room is relatively small, but includes a white ceramic commode and a square white ceramic washbasin with rounded corners. The walls are red and the floor is covered with very small mixed tiles.”

There appears to be a slight change in décor. There are two wallboards at the far end of the restaurant. The larger of the two appears to note the specials of the evening, and the smaller, a selection of wines.

There is an outside seating area on a raised porch with large umbrellas.

Debbie, Margo and Florence started with the “Salade Composee” – Lentil du Puy, Beets, Quinoa, Mix Heirloom Tomatoes. Peter started with Chilled Vichyssoise soup – Leeks, Light Cream. Joe opted for Cod Fish “Croquettes Brandade” – Sauce Gribiche, French Fries. I selected Roasted Beets & Grilled Leek Salad – Yogurt, Fresh Mint, Sherry Vinegar, Olive Oil.

For our entrees:

Florence – Grilled Norwegian Salmon – Pomme Puree, Garlic Spinach, Sauce Vierge;

Margo – Mussels Frites – White Wine, Shallot, Garlic, Butter and Parsley;

Debbie – Razor Clams – Linguini, Butter, Parsley, Anise;

Peter – Steak Frites – Entrecote, Tomato Provençale, Green Peppercorn Sauce;

Joe and Mike – Braised Rabbit – Linguini, White Wine, Cream, Basil.

The service was good. The serving person misunderstood what appetizers Debbie, Florence and Margo had ordered, and when he delivered the wrong dish to the table and one of them pointed out the error, he quickly replaced them.

Reservations are recommended, particularly given the relatively small size of the restaurant.

Parking is on the street.

Dinner is served Tuesday through Sunday; lunch Tuesday through Friday; and brunch Saturday & Sunday.

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macon
bistro & larder
5520 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, dc 20015
202-248-7807
Maconbistro.com

Rachel, Mike M, Debbie, and I went to “macon” for dinner on the same day that The Washingtonian came out with its review of the restaurant. Our experience was notably different when it came to several of the criticisms in The Washingtonian review.

The entrance to the restaurant is in an Arcade that is entered from Wisconsin Avenue. There are a number of other businesses that are also entered off the Arcade.

There are five eating areas “in” the restaurant. The first is outside, on a fenced-off section of the very large sidewalk. There are 5 four -tops under a couple of large, yellow umbrellas. In order to be seated in this area you do have to enter the restaurant.

The second eating area is in the wide Arcade hallway. There are 3 four-tops and 1 two-top on each side of the entrance to the restaurant, which is on the left as you come down the hall. Again, you need to enter the restaurant to be seated in this area.

As you enter the restaurant the reception desk is on your right.

Behind the reception desk, along the Arcade wall (which is glass), there are 2 tables, one seating up to eight and another seating five. Directly across from those tables is the open kitchen.

The fourth area is directly in front of the reception desk, and consists of a number of 2s, 4s and 6s (various combos are possible) in an L shape, with the long side of the wall against the Arcade wall and the short side against the front wall, which is also glass. There are a few others 2s and 4s inside of the L.

Finally, directly across from the entrance is a large bar with high stools, seating up to 9 people.

The ceiling is high. The ceiling and walls are rough hewn, with large exposed pipes in the ceiling.

For starters we shared Fried Green Tomatoes/pork belly, watercress, spiced tomato aioli; Haricot Verts, shallots, butter, parsley; Deviled eggs and Essie's Biscuits. I also had the Chilled Corn Soup, shrimp, cornbread croutons, chipotle oil.

For her entre Debbie selected one of the starters, Nicoise Salad, grilled little gem, heirloom tomatoes, anchovies, hardboiled-egg vinaigrette. Rachel and Mike M chose the Cauliflower Steak, ratatouille, spring vegetable emulsion, thyme crumble. They enjoyed this truly vegetarian dish, but thought it could have been cooked just a little longer.

I selected the Short Ribs, stone ground grits, crispy shallots. Contrary to The Washingtonian description of the dish as "stringy, dry short rib perched over watery grits," I found the short rib to be cooked perfectly. It came apart with just the gentlest touch and it was properly moist. The grits served to me were exactly the right texture and certainly not watery.

For dessert we shared Gigi Mama's Coconut Cake and a Coffee Praline Sundae, both of which were excellent.

Reservations are not required, but recommended. Mike M made our reservation and his experience could not have been more different than the comedy of errors described in The Washingtonian. He first went to Open Table, where

there was not a table available at the time we preferred. He then did what you should always do if Open Table says no and called the restaurant. He quickly received a reservation for the requested time.

The Washingtonian described the wait staff as “earnest if a little flighty.” There was nothing flighty about the service we received from Bryan, our waiter. He was patient with our various questions and checked in on us numerous times during the evening, even when no dishes were pending.

The restroom is located in the Arcade hall and is intended to be used by the various businesses in the Arcade. When I stopped at the reception desk to ask the location of the restrooms, one of the restaurant staff told me it was in the arcade hallway and then led me part way there to make sure that I found it.

It is a pretty standard, commercial restroom with a urinal, a commode, a washbasin and table, and a floor covered with small black and white tiles. The rest of the room is painted off white.

Currently, open only for dinner on Tuesday through Sunday.

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Silver Creek Outfitters

Ketchum, Idaho
The Men’s Room

The men’s room at this clothing and outdoor equipment store is worth noting and visiting, if you happen to be in the store.

It is in the basement level of the store. Everything, including the ceiling and floor, are wood covered. It is bright and has a fresh feeling to it.

There is a white ceramic commode and a silver metal, circular wash basin in a white marble tile top. This rests on a wooden shelf which is attached to the wall. There is one wooden leg at the near right corner. There are a variety of bottles with spray tops containing various cleansing products. Above the wash basin is a wood-framed mirror.

In one corner there is a two-shelf contraption made of small logs and wood slates on which rest various towels and a closed trash can.

Between the toilet and the washbasin there is a vivid sign that says:

Our toilets are sensitive...
Please only flush toilet paper
Use the provided trash can for all other waste
Products including
Paper towels, feminine products, garbage etc
Thank you for your cooperation, our
Plumbers appreciate it.

On one wall there is a very large picture of the head of a fish looking as if to bite something.

Reservations are not required.

Mike

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