

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 130

November 23, 2013

State of the Nation

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Action outside of Washington

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President Obama

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The Congress

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Restaurants

Chevy Chase, Maryland

Washington, DC

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State of the Nation

In the third week of November the WP/ABC poll found that 70% of us think the country is on the wrong track. In the last week of October the NBC/WSJ survey found the wrong track number to be 70%. This compares with the second week of October when the NBC/WSJ found that 78% of us thought the country was on the wrong track. This was the highest wrong track number the NBC/WSJ poll has found since Barack Obama became President.

In the same end-of-October survey 63% of Americans said they think that America is in a state of decline.

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The 16 day shutdown of the Federal Government in early October was the 18th shutdown since 1976. The most recent shutdown is the longest since 1978.

Here is a list of all 16 shutdowns:

1976 – 10 days
1977 – 3 shutdown, 12 days, 8 days, 8 days
1978 – 18 days
1979 – 11 days
1981 – 2 days
1982 – 2 shutdowns, 1 day, 3days
1983 – 3 days
1984 – 2 shutdowns, 2 days, 1 day
1986 – 1 day
1987 – 1 day
1990 – 3 days
1995 – 5 days
1996 – 21 days
2013 – 16 days

36% of Americans say blame for the most recent government shutdown is equally shared by Obama and Republicans in Congress. 38% place blame on the Republicans and 23% on the President. 50% think it is likely there will be another shutdown in January, when the current government funding bill runs out. Only 28% think it is not likely. [NBC/WSJ 10/28/13]

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Employment

For the month of September 2013, “unemployment” stood at 7.2%. Then, in October, with the Federal Government closed for 16 days, unemployment stood at 7.3%, down 2.7% from October 2009. These numbers do 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, but are available and have looked in the last 12 months. When those folks are added, we get an unemployed/underemployed number that is 13.6% for September and 13.8% for October 2013. [U.S. BLS] [All numbers seasonally adjusted]

Following is data for 2008-2013:

	<u>Aug</u> <u>2008</u>	<u>Jan</u> <u>2009</u>	<u>Oct</u> <u>2009</u>	<u>Oct</u> <u>2010</u>	<u>Oct</u> <u>2011</u>	<u>Oct</u> <u>2012</u>	<u>Sep</u> <u>2013</u>	<u>Oct</u> <u>2013</u>
Unemployed	6.1	7.8	10.0	9.5	8.9	7.9	7.2	7.3
Unemployed +	10.8	14.2	17.1	16.7	16.0	14.5	13.6	13.8

Gallup also does a survey which is a 30-day rolling average. Note that the unemployment/underemployment number varies from that put out by the BLS. (BLS surveys those 16 years of age and older, while Gallup surveys those 18 years of age and older.) For September, Gallup has unemployment at 7.6% and unemployment/underemployment at 17.0%. For October, unemployment is recorded as 7.4% and unemployment/underemployment at 16.5%.

15% of those under the age of 25 in the United States are unemployed. (New York Times 10/26/13)

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As the discussion goes forward on how to cut the Federal budget, playing around with Social Security may be particularly difficult.

41% would increase Social Security/ 46% would leave it the same -- 87%
Democrats 49% increase/46% same -- 95%
Republicans 35% increase/45% same -- 80%
Independents 37% increase/45% same -- 82%

At end of 2012, 57 million people were receiving retirement, disability or survivor's benefits, at a cost of \$768 billion. 161 million people paid payroll taxes.

Since 2010, Social Security's cash expenses have exceeded its cash receipts.

Based on the current benefit formulas, and assuming that the cap on taxable income is not raised, Social Security's reserves will be depleted somewhere between 2031 and 2033. [Pew Research Center 10/16/13]

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Gallup Potpourri

49% of us believe that the laws covering the sale of firearms “should be made more strict,” while 13% believe they should be less strict. 37% would keep the laws as they are now.

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Of those who own guns, 60% say they do so for personal safety/protection; 36% for hunting; 21% for recreation/sport/target shooting.

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60% favor the death penalty “for a person convicted of murder.” 80% held that view in 1994.

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78% of all Americans say they are registered to vote. This number includes 85% of Non-Hispanic whites, 81% of Non-Hispanic Blacks, 60% of Asians, and 51% of Hispanics. It appears that there are substantial differences between the registration rates of Asians and Hispanics who are born outside the United States and those who are born in this country.

75% of Asians who were born in this country say they are registered, but only 52% of those born outside the country.

76% of Hispanics who were born in this country say they are registered, but only 31% of those born outside the country.

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No surprise, between 2002 and 2013 there has been a dramatic increase in the use of the internet by U.S. adults.

	<u>2002</u>	<u>2013</u>	
All adults	69%	87%	+18
65 and older	33	65	+32
50-64 years of age	56	87	+31
High school or less	51	77	+26

More than \$20,000
in household income 42 73 +31

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52% believe there is “plenty of opportunity” in the United States today. This is down from 87% in 1952; 81% in 1998; and 57% in 2012. 43% say there is not much opportunity, up from 8% in 1952.

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In 1998, 68% believed that the economic system in the United States was basically fair. Today, the number who hold that view is 50%. No surprise, 67% of Republicans see the system as fair, but only 38% of Democrats have that view. 52% of Independents believe it is fair.

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55% of Americans believe that crime is a serious problem in this country. However, only 13% have that view about the area in which they live.
[Gallup October, November, 2013]

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Americans are increasingly concerned about healthcare in the United States. In early September, 10% said that poor healthcare/high cost of healthcare was the most important problem facing the country. By early October, 12% had that view and by early November 19% made that call. [Gallup]

57% oppose the “federal law making changes to the health care system.”
[WP/ABC 11/13]

The Affordable Care Act was designed to deal with both of these issues. Instead, the rollout of the ACA has become the issue that has eclipsed all others. The Administration seems to be unable to change the subject no matter how many speeches the President makes.

To make matters worse only 37% of respondents believe that the ACA is a totally good idea. 47% believe it is a totally bad idea.

At no time since the ACA became law in March 2010, have more than 40% of Americans thought it is a good idea. Only in January 2011, when 39% thought it was a good idea and 39% thought it was a bad idea, has the number thinking it is a bad idea not exceeded those who think it is a good idea. [NBC/WSJ 10/28/13]

58% of Americans support requiring companies with 50 or more employees to provide health insurance to their employees or pay a fine. However, 65% oppose the requirement that all Americans have health insurance or pay a fine. [WP/ABC 11/13]

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Abortion – The Use of Words

In response to the section on abortion in the October 2013 Watch, a reader in Wyoming sent me an email. I think the relevant portion of her email should be shared:

“I love words. I am aware of the power of words as they are used in labeling. I believe that one of the great misused words/labels is Pro-Life.

“My recommendation to you and all others discussing the matter of abortion, especially in a public forum, is that you refer to those currently labeled Pro-Life as Anti-Choice.

“Everyone I know who is Pro-Choice is also Pro-Life. I believe that most Pro-Choice advocates would say that they are Pro-Life, Anti-Abortion and Pro-Choice. I think you can be all three without being a hypocrite.

“I think there is nothing simple about the abortion debate. I believe it is a most personal, truly sacred, issue.”

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Tea Party favorability is down generally and across Party lines. Yet, given the opportunities of modern media and the low turnout at primaries, their impact continues pretty much unabated.

		<u>Favorable</u>		
All	33%	36%	37%	30%
Republicans	51	64	62	53
Democrats	21	17	20	13
Independents	34	36	38	30
	Feb 2010	Aug 2011	June 2013	Oct 2013

		<u>Unfavorable</u>		
All	25%	43%	45%	49%
Republicans	10	22	23	27
Democrats	37	66	65	69
Independents	24	41	43	49
	Feb 2010	Aug 2011	June 2013	Oct 2013
			[PEW 10/16/13]	

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Action Outside of Washington

Here is an observation from a column by Mathew Dowd that seems to be right on point.

“Leadership in the future is going to come more and more from outside Washington. Folks in communities around the country are finding solutions and building consensus in their neighborhoods. And as each day goes forward with DC in dysfunction, the federal government is going to become more and more irrelevant to their lives. And the leaders of tomorrow are going to emerge from towns and cities out in America where with limited time and resources they are getting the job done. We don’t need term limits because folks are just going to tune out leaders in DC more and more.” [10/11/13]

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The failure of legislators in Washington to strengthen personal privacy laws has led to a variety of State legislatures taking action on their own.

Texas now requires a warrant for email searches.

Oklahoma passed legislation to protect the privacy of student data.

California has passed 3 online privacy bills this year. One, giving students the right to erase social media posts, and another making it a misdemeanor to post identifiable nude pictures with the subject's person, and a third relating to "do not track" signals.

Montana now requires a search warrant before police can track a suspect's whereabouts through cellphone records.

8 States have passed laws limiting the use of drones.

10 States have passed laws "restricting employers from demanding access to their employee's social media accounts." [NYT 10/10/13]

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President Obama

The public's grade for the job President Obama is doing (as found by Gallup) is 41% approval/56% disapproval, as of 11/19/13. Of the 5 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. The list of 6 follows:

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Reagan	65	24 (11/18/85)
Eisenhower	58	27 (11/12/57)
Clinton	61	30 (11/23/97)
<u>Obama</u>	41	56 (11/19/13)
G Bush (II)	38	57 (11/20/05)
Nixon	27	63 (11/5/73)

<u>Date</u>	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>	<u>CNN/ORC</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>
Nov 2013	xxx	42/55%	41/56%	37/57%(CBS)
Oct 2013	42/51%	48/49%	xxx	xxx
Oct 2013	47/48%	xxx	43/53%	46/49% (CBS)
Sept 2013	45/50%	47/47%	45/52%	46/46%
Aug 2013 *	44/48% (NBC)	xxx	xxx	xxx
July 2013	45/50%	49/44%	xxx	48/45% (CBS)
June 2013	48/47%	xxx	45/54%*	47/43%
Apr 2013	47/48%	50/45%*	51/47%	47/45%
Jan 2013	52/44%	55/41%	55/43%	51/41%

On not a single one of the following issues, does Obama have an approval rating of more than 38%.

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>
The economy	37%	60%
Foreign policy	38	54
Health care	36	61
Immigration	37	52
Federal deficit	29	66

[Fox News 11/13]

Perhaps of greater significance, Obama's ratings on a number of personal qualities have gone negative for the first time.

52% say that Obama is not honest and trustworthy.

50% say he does not have strong leadership qualities.

To add insult to injury, 51% say that Obama is "not paying enough attention to what his administration is doing." 53% say the Administration has not been competent in running the government. [Quinnipiac 11/13]

51% say he does not understand "the problems of people like you." [WP/ABC 11/13]

45% have negative feelings toward Obama with 41% having positive feelings. [NBC/WSJ 10/28/13]

52% have an unfavorable opinion of Barack Obama. [WP/ABC 11/13]

45% say that Obama's views are too liberal. This is the highest number taking this position since he became President. [WP/ABC 11/13]

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2016

It is way too early to handicap the 2016 Presidential race. So, for the foreseeable future the Watch's only attention to the race will be to keep a running list of folks who are being mentioned in one source or another. The Republican list has been expanded since the October edition of WW.

<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	

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Here is another observation from Mathew Dowd that hits the spot.

“The GOP is a party that looks demographically like a party of the future, but with solutions based too much on the past. And the Democrats look demographically like a party of the future, but with solutions based too much on the past. We need a party that both looks like America today and tomorrow, and with policies, solutions and governmental structure designed for the future. We are not getting that from either party.” [10/11/13]

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The Congress

9% of Americans approve of the way Congress is doing its work. This is the lowest approval rating Gallup has recorded in the 39 years it has been asking this question. The average approval rating of the Congress during that period is 33%. The average for the first 11 months of 2013 is 14%.

73% disapprove of the way that Republicans in Congress are handling their job and 62% disapprove of the way the Democrats are handling their job. [Quinnipiac 11/13]

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Over a two week period in October, preference for a Congress controlled by Democrats went from an 8 point pro-Democrat spread (47% to 39%) to a 4 point pro-Democrat spread (45% to 41%). 63% say that rather than re-electing the current incumbent, a new person should be given a chance to serve. This is the highest number recorded in the NBC/WSJ survey going back to January 1992.

And 30% now say that in a three-way race between a Democrat, a Republican, and an Independent or third- party candidate, they would vote for the Independent or third-party candidate. 28% would vote for the Republican and 30% for the Democrat.

In the same vein, 73% believe that their own representative in Congress is contributing to the problems. [NBC/WSJ 10/28/13]

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At the beginning of the current session of Congress, the average age of House members was 57 years, while the average age of members of the Senate was 62 years.

The average tenure of members of the House was 9.1 years, and the average tenure of Senators was 10.2 years. [Cong. Research Service]

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THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats	53
Republicans	45
Independents	2

There have been a few changes since the October issue of the Watch.

Michigan moves from Safe Democrat to Leaning Democrat
Louisiana moves from TossUp to Leaning Democrat
Kentucky moves from TossUp to Leaning Republican

* Italics denotes the retirement of a current member.

Safe Democrat(12)	Leaning Democrat(5)	TossUp(1)	Leaning Republican(5)	Safe Republican(12)
Colorado	Alaska	Arkansas	<i>Georgia</i>	Alabama
Delaware	Iowa		Kentucky	Idaho
Hawaii	Louisiana		<i>Montana</i>	Kansas
Illinois	<i>Michigan</i>		<i>So. Dakota</i>	Maine
<i>Massachusetts</i>	No. Carolina		<i>West Virginia</i>	Mississippi
Minnesota				<i>Nebraska</i>
New Hampsh.				Oklahoma
<i>New Jersey</i>				So. Carolina
New Mexico				So. Carolina
Oregon				Tennessee
Rhode Island				Texas
Virginia				Wyoming

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Seats not up in 2014	34	31
Safe in 2014	12	12
Leaning in 2012	5	5
Total	51	48

Toss-ups 1D

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THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

There has been little change in the structure of the House of Representatives races since the September issue of the Watch, based on the Cook Political Report.

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>4/17/13</u>	<u>9/5/13</u>	<u>10/17/13</u>	<u>11/6/13</u>
Total Dem	201	201	201	202	202
Solid Dem	167	166	163	165	165
Likely Dem	17	18	14	12	12
Lean Dem	11	11	15	15	15
Toss-up	7	8	10	12	13
D	6	6	9	10	10
R	1	2	1	2	3
Lean GOP	7	10	11	15	16
Likely GOP	18	18	17	16	15
Solid GOP	208	204	205	200	199
Total GOP	234	234	234	233	233

The WW also reviews “The Rothenberg Political Report.”
[Thanks to the Rothenberg Report.]

	<u>3/12</u>	<u>4/19</u>	<u>6/14</u>	<u>7/19</u>	<u>8/23</u>	<u>10/9</u>	<u>11/8</u>
Total Democrat	201	200	194	202	202	202	202
Safe Democrat	176	176	177	175	175	175	175
D Favored	10	10	8	8	8	7	7
Lean D	6	6	9	10	11	11	11
Toss Up/Tilt D	6	6	5	5	5	6	6
Toss Up-D	3	2	3	3	3	3	3
Toss Up-R	2	3	1	1	1	2	3
Toss Up/Tilt R	5	5	5	5	5	4	4
Lean R	5	5	5	5	5	6	8
R Favored	13	13	10	10	11	11	10
Safe Republican	207	208	212	212	211	211	208
Total Republican	234	234	227	233	233	233	233

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Restaurants

Chevy Chase, Maryland
La Ferme

Washington, DC
Hill Country Barbecue-Market

La Ferme
7101 Brookville Road
Chevy Chase MD 20815
301-986-5255
lafermerestaurant@gmail.com

In June 2002 I did a review of La Ferme. Debbie and I went there recently with Rita and Bob, and it struck me that it might be interesting to look back on that review and see what, if anything, had changed.

On the whole, not much has changed.

In 2002 I wrote, “It feels homey when you walk in and while you are having dinner.” That has not changed.

Tables seating parties of 2, 4, 5, 6 or 8 are placed in two raised areas that extend right and left from the entry, and a main dining area which is a few steps below. There are also two, 2-person tables on a high balcony on one side of the room.

Debbie started with the Avocado and Crabmeat salad. Bob and Rita chose the Mache with apples, walnuts, Roquefort, pomegranates and balsamic vinaigrette. Bob also ordered the French onion soup gratinee with Swiss Emmenthal. I opted for an Assortment of House-smoked seafood with sesame seaweed salad and horseradish sauce.

As a main course Rita chose Herb roasted “Tournedo” of Norwegian salmon with a warm vegetable flan; frisee salad and black olive butter. No surprise, Bob picked Roast half free-range chicken “Frestiere” (sautéed fingerling potatoes and wild mushrooms).

I selected the Pan-seared Chilean sea bass (my favorite fish), served over mashed potatoes with Swiss chard and Beurre rouge. It turns out that my preference for Chilean sea bass is not new. In 2002, I had Sautéed Chilean sea bass with barley risotto, ragout of wild mushrooms, and a garlic and parsley cream sauce.

For dessert Debbie and I shared a Grand Marinie Soufflé, and Bob and Rita shared a Chocolate Soufflé.

In 2002, “The service is attentive and it appears that the service personnel have been at their craft for a long time.”

That was certainly the case on the current visit. The one service glitch was when Bob asked for his salad and French Onion soup to be delivered at the same time, it took several reminders before it was presented. Observing the scene, it appeared to me that the soup was delivered to a lower shelf of a serving station right behind our table. By the time Bob started asking for it, the server likely realized that the soup was cold and ordered a fresh bowl.

There is an interesting note at the bottom of the menu: “Minimum food and beverage for dinner: \$20.00 per guest.” It is hard to imagine what one could order for dinner that would be less than that, but it must have happened.

In 2002 I wrote, “The restaurant is a little noisy, but not so as to make it unpleasant.” That remains the case today.

The piano player is still off in the corner doing his thing. As he did a dozen years ago, he played Happy Birthday at least ten times, with various numbers of the diners chiming in with the words.

In 2002, I described the men’s room, “The men’s room has one urinal, hung on a wall of large dark green marble-like squares, one commode in a tan partial-wall enclosure with a door and one wash basin in a light green marble countertop. It is perfectly serviceable and clean.”

In this area there have been some changes. The marble squares are gone, replaced by green painted walls. The urinal is still hung on a wall of large dark green squares. The green marble countertop and washbasin are gone. They have been replaced by a large white ceramic washbasin, attached to the wall and held up by two decorative white ceramic legs.

There is a large parking lot.

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Hill Country
Barbecue-Market
410 Seventh Street NW
Washington, DC
202-556-2050
Fax 202-556-2040
HillCountryWDC.com
For Catering Package for 10 or more call
202-556-2044 or Events@HillCountry WDC.com

In a first for the Washington Watch, this review of Hill Country is based on a meal eaten there as part of a delightful wedding.

On a Saturday morning in early November, Kathryn Hamm and Amy Walter were married in D.C. Superior Court. I can't recall a more joyous ceremony.

Following the wedding, with the brides riding in a decorated pedicab with their son Caleb, and those of us who were guests at the wedding walking behind them, we traveled several blocks down the street to the Hill Country, Barbecue-Market for lunch.

The party was in the basement room of the restaurant. There was loud music and places for the young people to play around the large family style tables.

The buffet lunch included Longhorn Cheddar Mac & Cheese, Green Bean Casserole with Durkee Onions, Potato Salad, Sliced Moist Brisket, Beef Back Ribs, Turkey Breast, and Skillet Cornbread.

There was a variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, including Iced Tea and Lemonade in 16 or 32 oz. Mason jars. Also, Mexican Coca Cola, which uses real cane sugar.

I decided to give myself a "meal off" from my current controlled eating regimen and enjoyed every bite.

Kathryn and Amy said that working with Hill Country was an outstanding experience. It was low key, flexible, family-friendly, and long on flavor. "It was awesome."

Hill Country is the unofficial restaurant of the Cook Political Report. Charlie Cook says this is “the real McCoy when it comes to restaurants designed to mimic those in South Texas.”

One of the things I learned is that there are two kinds of Brisket, Moist or Lean...Moist being code for fat.

While at times in my life I have had what might be described as a cavernous appetite, some of the items on the regular menu even gave me pause.

One of the Barbecue Specials that is served all day is The Pitmaster (for 1), a ¼ lb. Lean Brisket (\$2 more for Moist), One Pork Spare Rib, One Beef Rib, a Quarter Chicken (white or dark), and any two Good Eatin’ (8oz) Sides. The price is \$27. The same combination for two people is only \$53.

In short, this is not the place for a quick snack.

There is delivery for a reasonable price in an area that is bordered by U Street on the North, M Street SW on the South, 23rd Street on the West, and 13th Street NE on the East.

Mike

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