



## Today in Liberty: CPAC 2014 kicks off today, Crimea to hold secession referendum, NSA chief threatens press

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by Jason Pye

*“Sometimes you have to beat the Republicans before you beat the Democrats.”* — Matt Kibbe

— **Happy Anniversary, Rand Paul!**: One year ago today, Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) made history in the Senate by with a 13-hour talking filibuster against John Brennan’s CIA nomination. Though it didn’t stop Brennan’s confirmation, it did raise awareness to the Obama administration’s drone strikes policy and, almost single-handedly, changed public opinion on the issue. You see our coverage of the filibuster here and here. You can also watch the filibuster, if you have 13 hours to spare, in full via C-SPAN.

— **CPAC 2014 begins today**: The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), the largest annual gathering of conservatives, will begin this morning at 9 am with a speech from Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX). Other speakers today include Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Gov. Chris Christie (R-NJ), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), and Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT). C-SPAN will air part of today’s events, beginning at 12:40 pm. *Politico* has a list of things to watch for this weekend.

— **Crimea to hold secession referendum**: The *Wall Street Journal* reports this morning that Crimea will soon hold a national referendum on secession from Ukraine in order to join the Russian Federation. “The pro-Russian government also pushed forward the date for the vote by two weeks to March 16. Prior descriptions of the referendum had been more vague, saying the vote would explore the issues of autonomy from Kiev,” the *Journal* reports. “The region’s parliament said in a statement that the move was being taken “[as the] result of the unconstitutional coup’ that put a new government in place in Kiev last month and the ‘flagrant violation of the laws of Ukraine’ by nationalist forces.”

— **37 changes to Obamacare — and counting**: With yesterday’s major tweaks to Obamacare, the Galen Institute has updated its list of changes to the law. “[M]ore than 37 significant changes already have been made to ObamaCare: at least 20 that President Obama has made unilaterally, 15 that Congress has passed and the president has signed, and 2 by the Supreme Court,” wrote Tyler Hartsfield and Grace-Marie Turner. “But even this large number of changes hasn’t stopped the cascade of failures we are seeing today in the implementation of the law.” You can view the full list here.

— **House committee chairs break with GOP leadership:** Twelve House committee chairman broke with House Republican leadership on the flood insurance bill passed the chamber on Monday. “Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) brought the bill to the floor over the objections of the head of the Financial Services Committee, Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas), who warned the legislation would undo changes that sought to put the debt-ridden insurance program on sounder fiscal footing,” *The Hill* reports. “While some of the chairmen cited policy concerns with the bill, others complained that party leaders had sidelined Hensarling and instead negotiated with the top Democrat on his panel, Rep. Maxine Waters (Calif.)” It’s notable because chairmen typically, though not always, fall in line with leadership. The flood insurance measure is pretty terrible. R.J. Lehmann of the R Street Institute notes that it “makes clear that members are unwilling to stand behind the free-market principles and fiscal responsibility that the House leadership claims to embrace.”

— **NSA chief pushing “media leaks legislation”:** So...this is ominous. Outgoing NSA Director Gen. Keith Alexander is touting coming legislation that would stifle freedom of the press. “Recently, what came out with the justices in the United Kingdom...they looked at what happened on Miranda and other things, and they said it’s interesting: journalists have no standing when it comes to national security issues,” Alexander said this week in a panel at Georgetown University. “They don’t know how to weigh the fact of what they’re giving out and saying, is it in the nation’s interest to divulge this,” adding that “headway” is being made on “media leaks,” including unidentified legislation.

— **Obama knew CIA was spying on Senate committee staffers:** Sen. Mark Udall (D-CO) alleges that President Obama was aware that the CIA monitored Senate Intelligence Committee staffers. “As you are aware,” Udall wrote in a letter to Obama, according to *The Guardian*, “the CIA has recently taken unprecedented action against the committee in relation to the internal CIA review and I find these actions to be incredibly troubling for the Committee’s oversight powers and for our democracy.” Uh, wow.

— **Here, have some taxes:** Nicole Kaeding of the Cato Institute offers a run down of the tax hikes in President Obama’s FY 2015 budget proposal. The two biggest ticket items, she notes, are limiting tax deductions (\$598 billion over 10 years) and changing to international taxation (\$276 billion). “Instead of moving the United States to a territorial tax system like the rest of the industrialized world,” Kaeding wrote, “the president proposes further raising taxes on corporation[s] with overseas earnings.”

— **And how ‘bout spending nearly \$6 trillion by 2024:** Yep, that’s exactly what President Obama’s budget proposal would do over the next 10 years. “Outlays would grow from \$3.9 trillion in 2015 to \$5.91 trillion in 2024. In theory, the growth would be roughly commensurate with growth in the economy, ticking up just slightly from 21.4 percent of GDP to 21.5 percent over the course of a decade,” Peter Suderman explains. “But the White House has been coy with details about its assumptions regarding the projected growth rate of the economy, so it’s hard to assess this beyond face value.”

— **Less money, more school choice:** Patrick Wolf explains President Obama should be backing school choice programs to help young, male minorities. “We should be thrilled that our President

has acknowledged publicly the persistent challenges that young African American men face in modern day America and, more importantly, has pledged to encourage concrete actions to address those challenges,” wrote Wolf. “The first step Mr. Obama should take is to push for more private-school choice through vouchers or scholarship programs. The President’s own U.S. Department of Education has already determined that such programs significantly improve educational attainment for African Americans.”

— **Russia Today anchor quits on-air:** Liz Wahl says that she can no longer be “part of a network that whitewashes the actions of [Russian President Vladimir] Putin,” adding that she’s “proud to be an American” and “believe[s] in disseminating the truth.” She resigned after the news cast. Russia Today, also known as “RT,” is funded by the Russian government.

— **Tea Party funding doesn’t come from big donors:** Over at the *Washington Examiner*, Tim Carney debunks the notion that Tea Party groups are astroturf campaigns funded by big money donors. “People who do actual reporting — in this case, the Center for Public Integrity — come to more nuanced conclusions,” wrote Carney, pointing to this report from CPI which found that 10 super PACs that raised at least \$500,000 received half of their contributions from people who gave \$200 or less. Carney ended with this: “Guess what? Seven of those ten are groups dedicated to dragging the GOP rightward.”

— **Federal Reserve “a cancer on our economy”:** Our friends at the Hastings Public Debate Forum, a student organization at UC Hastings Law School, recently talked asked some people in walking around in San Francisco’s financial district about markets and the 2008 financial crisis. Unlike the organization’s first video, in which people gave some ridiculous answers about foreign policy, the answers in this latest video may surprise and enlighten you.