

# Georgia's transportation crisis, Indiana and Arkansas to 'fix' RFRA and California's new drought measures: US state blog round up for 28 March – 3 April

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USApp Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson**, looks at the week in U.S. state blogging. [Click here](#) for our weekly roundup of national blogs.

## Northeast

This week in the Granite State, *NH Labor News* [reports](#) that the state's Republican Party this week pushed through their 'immoral reckless' budget through the legislature. They comment that the budget has drawn outrage from New Hampshire labor leaders because it makes cuts to programs that will help people to overcome their addictions to drugs and alcohol, as well as cuts to funding for community colleges, hospitals and correctional facilities.

On Monday, *RI Future* [argues](#) that Rhode Island should repeal its Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), in reaction to the controversy over similar laws in Indiana and Arkansas this week. They say that it is part of Rhode Island's DNA to accept no persecution or privilege based on religious convictions, and that it would be good for the economy as businesses will respond well to a renewed commitment to equality, freedom, and acceptance.

Heading over to New York, *State of Politics* [writes](#) this week that Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo has stated that the negotiations over this year's state budget have been the hardest he has ever dealt with since taking office, and that he is still pushing for ethics reform legislation concerning the disclosure of legal clients of state lawmakers.



Governor of New York State, Andrew Cuomo Credit: Diana Robinson (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

The big news out of New Jersey this week was the indictment of Senator Bob Menendez on corruption charges. *Save Jersey* [gives](#) us five things that we may be missing around the indictment, including that he may be both guilty *and* a victim of political retribution, and that he was also helped by other big name Democrats in recent years. Staying in the Garden State, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that Governor Chris Christie has pardoned a resident of Pennsylvania who had been arrested in New Jersey after being pulled over and telling a police officer she was carrying a legally owned handgun, which was registered in the Keystone State.

Moving on to Pennsylvania, *PoliticsPA* [writes](#) on Thursday that turnout in last year's gubernatorial race dropped by 12.4 percent, bucking the trend that such races have the highest turnout of off-year elections.

## South

On Thursday, *The Democratic Truth* [says](#) that a new report into voting irregularities in the 2014 election has raised serious concerns over the equipment used in around 1/5<sup>th</sup> of voting precincts in the state. They say that the WinVote touchscreen system may be barred from use in future elections because of vulnerabilities in the security of its wireless capability.

This week, Kentucky's *Blue in the Bluegrass* calls for a boycott of the state over its own RFRA. They [comment](#) that while Indiana is facing boycotts from businesses and organizations over its religious discrimination bill, no-one seems to have noticed that Kentucky passed a similar law in 2013.

Georgia too has been under fire for its own RFRA law – but *Peach Pundit* reminds us that one of the state's biggest problems is actually its transportation crisis. They [say](#) that Georgia currently has no way to fund the transportation system that it needs right now, and nor can it pay to fund infrastructure to promote future growth. While the state House and Senate have been working through transport funding legislation, they comment that it is only a 'half-step' solution.

Florida has also been experiencing budget woes this week – *Saint Peters Blog* [writes](#) Thursday that the two chambers of the state legislature are at odds over a new budget, with a more than \$4 billion difference between the two. The Senate budget is higher as it includes billions in federal aid intended to help hospitals as well as Affordable Care Act related funding.

Arkansas was very much in the news this week over its own RFRA law, which was up for signing by Governor Asa Hutchinson. On Monday, *Arkansas blog* [looks](#) at what makes the state's religious freedom bill different to those already in place in other states. They say that in contrast to other RFRA bills (and the national one), Arkansas' allows a private individual to file a claim under the act even when the government is not a party under the claim. On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [reports](#) that Governor Hutchinson has said that he will not sign the law (though it was passed by state legislators) unless the differences between the language of the state bill and the national bill are fixed.

## Midwest

In the Buckeye State this week, *Ohio Daily* [says](#) that GOO Governor John Kasich has unusually done a good thing, by taking a stand against a provision in a state transportation bill which would require college students to acquire an Ohio drivers license and car registration within 30 days of coming to the state if they wished to vote, at a cost of nearly \$100 – a poll tax. They write that Kasich vetoed this item out of the transportation bill, and that it was the right thing to do.

Indiana's RFRA (signed into law last week by Governor Mike Pence) continued to cause controversy and debate across America this week. *Indy Politics* [writes](#) on Saturday that more than 2,000 people attended a rally at the State Capital to protest against the law. By Friday, *Town Hall* [reports](#) that Pence had 'caved' to 'liberal outrage' and that he has stated that the law needs to be clarified or fixed. *Masson's Blog* has a comprehensive [assessment](#) of the wording of the 'RFRA fix' proposed in Indiana, commenting that it more closely defines who cannot be discriminated against under the law and who (and what) 'providers' of services are. *Hit & Run* [says](#) that a pizzeria in Indiana, Memories, whose owner told reporters that they would not cater for a gay wedding, has raised more



Ohio Governor John Kasich – Photo Credit: Governor Beshear (Creative Commons: BY-NC-ND 2.0)

than \$700,000 via the Go Fund Me website after they stated that they would have to close their business after death threats and boycotts.

Heading up to the Badger State, *Uppity Wisconsin* [calls out](#) Republican Governor, Scott Walker as 'two-faced' for criticizing Obamacare whilst at the same time accepting \$69 million in federal funding for the state as part of the program.

On Friday, *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) that Governor Sam Brownback has signed a bill into law which would make the state the sixth in the country to allow those over 21 years old to carry concealed firearms regardless of whether or not they have obtained a permit – the so-called 'constitutional carry' law.

## **West and Pacific**

Montana's *Cowgirl* blog [writes](#) this week on what they are 'five mind-bogglingly stupid things' that they say the state House has done to decimate the state's outdoor economy. These include a measure which requires the state's Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks to dedicate \$350,000 annually to shooting ranges, and a massive increase in the cost of non-resident hunting and fishing licenses.

Heading south to Colorado, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that the Centennial State has filed a brief with the Supreme Court to reject a lawsuit from Nebraska and Oklahoma which seeks to overturn Colorado's recreational marijuana law. The two states want to stop the flow of marijuana into other states from Colorado, though if successful, this may actually lead to more, not less cross border trafficking.

On Monday, Nevada's *Desert Beacon* [looks](#) at a new bills proposed by the state's legislature which would restrict the times and days of voting, as well on where polling stations can be located. They say that the measures are a form of vote suppression, which may make it very hard for the poor to have their democratic say.

In California this week, Governor Jerry Brown ordered mandatory water use reductions for the first time in the Golden State's history. *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that four years into a major drought, California residents have a chance to change their habits and to find new ways of living. *Fox & Hounds* [disagrees](#) with Governor Brown's measure, arguing that California cannot conserve or regulate its way out of drought, and instead it should invest in the state's 'grossly dilapidated and inadequate water infrastructure' and revamp its water and environmental protection policies to address 21<sup>st</sup> century concerns.

Heading out west, *Honolulu Civil Beat* wonders on Wednesday if there are more guns in Hawaii than people, given that gun ownership has grown by 300 percent in the past 15 years.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USApp– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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