

## Hobby Lobby ruling, poor ratings for Obama, and why is Ann Coulter afraid of soccer? – US national blog round up for 28 June – 4 July

*USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson looks at the best in political blogging from the Beltway. Our round-up of state blogs will follow on Saturday afternoon.*

### The Democratic Party, the GOP and elections

This week was a rough one for Barack Obama, with a new poll ranking him as the worst President since World War II, [according](#) to the *Daily Signal*. They say that 33 percent of poll respondents chose Obama as the worst, surpassing George W. Bush by 5 points. On Monday, *The American Prospect* [says](#) that the fight over executive authority is likely to define the rest of the Obama presidency, as he works to achieve domestic policy goals against a recalcitrant Congress. They say that Obama has increasingly sought out creative and problematic ways to govern despite the Republican Party's opposition to his policy goals and to the idea of him governing at all. The GOP is so against Obama's agenda that the Speaker, John Boehner has recently stated that he is building up a lawsuit against the President over his use of executive orders. *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) on Tuesday that during a speech on the economy, Obama challenged Boehner to go ahead stating "So sue me. As long as they're doing nothing, I'm not going to apologize for trying to do something". They say that Obama is hoping that the Republican Party will rise to his challenge, and that a lawsuit (which is likely to fail), would only serve to energize Democratic voters for this fall's mid-term elections.

On Wednesday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) ahead to the mid-terms, saying that Democrats have a problem getting single women to vote, which is important, as they tend to vote Democratic by large margins. They say that Democrats are now looking to boost turnout among this group by focusing on issues like abortion rights, education and pay equity. If they are able to motivate their base, they write, they may just win.

Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was in the news again this week, as speculation continued about a potential presidential run in 2016, in the wake of the release of her new book *Hard Choices* in June. On Monday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at Clinton's strengths and weaknesses, writing that while that she has great experience, her support for the Iraq War in 2003, and the fact that she still seems to support open-ended military interventions, could count against her. Later in the week, *National Journal* [covers](#) the five Democrats who they say should run against Clinton in the 2016 Democratic Primary: Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill, former Senator Russell Feingold of Wisconsin and Missouri Governor, Jay Nixon.

Moving across the aisle to the Republican Party, *The Hill's Congress blog* [says](#) that Thad Cochran's victory in last week's Mississippi's Senate Primary should worry the GOP for the midterms. They write that Cochran's campaign, which focused on African American communities shows that these field programs work. The problem? Democrats tend to win overwhelmingly in such communities. On Saturday, *United Liberty* [writes](#) that Cochran's win is a bad thing for the GOP for another reason – that when the National Republican Senatorial Committee gets involved in such races by backing the incumbent, this may actually serve to keep the grassroots (who provide much of the legwork for campaigns), at home.

### Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

This week was dominated by the news that the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that a religious employer could not be required to provide employees with certain types of contraception under Obamacare. On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that the *Hobby Lobby* case is already creating new demands from faith leaders for the Obama

Administration to include a religious exemption within its coming executive order which would ban federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) this week that while the Obama Administration has not yet indicated how it will respond to the Supreme Court's ruling, Congress could act to through new legislation to protect employees and their family members from the objections of their employers to providing health plans that include contraceptive measures. This week also [saw](#) the release of a new poll that shows that the American public's confidence in the Supreme Court stands at 30 percent, the lowest since 1973, writes *Daily Kos*.

Government agencies were also discussed at length across the blogs this week. On Sunday, *United Liberty* [writes](#) that without Republican Senator Ted Cruz (TX) and Darrell Issa (R-CA) of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, the Attorney General, Eric Holder, would have buried the scandal over the Internal Revenue Service's alleged targeting of conservative groups. They say that Cruz made a speech in the Senate this week calling for a Special Prosecutor to investigate the affair. Moving on to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), *The American Prospect* [reports](#) on Monday that President Obama has chosen former Procter and Gamble executive, Robert McDonald to run the embattled agency. They have a primer of what he will need to



Ted Cruz Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

understand about the limits of the VA's electronic records program, and say that the records program made it easier for VA employees to obscure the human costs of their lack of action. Moving on to a much less well known agency, *Roll Call's The Container* [says](#) that the battle over the Export-Import Bank is likely to rage when Congress returns from its recess later in July. The bank, which is up for reauthorization in September, is at the centre of a debate within the GOP over whether or not its \$27 billion operation constitutes corporate welfare, or a genuine support for business.

The *Daily Signal* [writes](#) this week on why Congress needs to start thinking more about eliminating some government programs. They say that lawmakers are good at starting new programs, but are poor at shuttering those that no longer work or waste taxpayer dollars. They write that the increasing talk of stopgap budgetary measures rather than passing spending bills is helping spending to go up and increasing the number of poorly functioning, duplicate government programs.

On Tuesday, the *White House Dossier* [writes](#) that President Obama has proclaimed that he will overhaul the country's immigration system by executive action, working around Congress. They say that House Republicans no longer trust the President to enforce laws as written, and therefore will not be passing an immigration bill this year, and that it is not Congress' job to pass such a bill, simply because Obama wishes for reform that they do not agree with.

This week marked the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act by President Lyndon Johnson. *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that while it was one of the most important laws of the last century, there would be very little chance that it would be passed in today's Congress, given the bipartisanship of that era is now all but dead.

### Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Monday, *The Monkey Cage* [writes](#) on a recent \$8.9 billion fine levied on the French bank, BNP Paribas, for doing business in U.S dollars in states under U.S. sanction. They say that the fine is only one example of the U.S. acting extraterritorially, and that it is one of only a small number of states to enforce its laws on an international scale.

*Hit & Run* [reports](#) this week that the number of troops that the Obama Administration is to send to Iraq has grown

from 'up to 300' two weeks ago to around 750 now.

Border policy was also subject to political blog commentary this week – on Sunday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that Obama's policy of propping up 'bad actors' in Central America has led to a surge of children at the U.S. border. They say that the violence in countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala, in combination with the administration's near promise that illegal immigrant children would not be deported, has led to a surge of 40,000 unaccompanied minors coming into the U.S. since January. Writing on the same issue, *The Hill's Congress Blog* [says](#) that the children that have come to the U.S. illegally have been fleeing deadly circumstances in their own countries, and that the moral thing to do is to take them in, and care for and protect them, not to criminalize them.

### Obamacare and health policy

On Sunday, *PoliticusUSA* [reflects](#) on the Supreme Court's *Hobby Lobby* decision, writing that the ruling that corporations should have religious freedom when it comes to objecting to providing contraceptive coverage under Obamacare is 'idiotic'. Meanwhile, *RedState* [writes](#) that the White House does not really know what happened in the *Hobby Lobby* case. They say that the Obama Administration has confused the case as a constitutional law case, when it is in fact a statutory law case, and that its recent statements that Obama will consider mitigating the ruling via executive action ignores the fact that the contraceptive mandate was an executive order in the first place. Picking up on the contraceptive mandate, *Hit & Run* [writes](#) on Tuesday that it was never an essential component of Obamacare, as it was conceived by the legislators who wrote the law. They say that it is possible that the law would not even have passed had it explicitly included a contraceptive mandate.

On Wednesday, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at the type of care that people are likely to seek when they start using their new coverage under Obamacare. They say that studying Massachusetts' 2006 healthcare law – which was the basis for the Affordable Care Act – indicates that elective surgery rates may increase, especially amongst nonwhites, and that needed surgeries may fall due to better access to primary and specialty care.

This week the Supreme Court also struck down a Massachusetts law that abortion clinics were entitled to a 35-foot protest free zone. *The Monkey Cage* [says](#) that the change is not as dramatic as some think, because the network of clinic access protections (including some forms of buffer zones) was also upheld by the Court.

### The economy and society

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that conservative commentator Ann Coulter is right to fear the soccer World Cup, because her hatred of the sport exemplifies American exceptionalism, which values individualism, manliness and populism. They say that America is embracing soccer, with more watching America's game against Portugal than last year's World Series or this year's NBA finals, and that Americans like soccer because it connects them with the rest of the world, something that Coulter loathes.

This week, *Roll Call's The Container* [reports](#) that New York's highest court has ruled that state laws do not supersede local towns' authority to outlaw fracking, after two communities banned the practice in 2011.



Ann Coulter Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

On Tuesday, *The American Prospect* [writes](#) that Wall Street is continuing to ‘sandbag’ the U.S. economy with the return of subprime interest rates, the lack of movement to regulate high speed trading and cuts to social spending. They say that the answer is a massive public investment program in basic infrastructure and a transition towards a sustainable economy. Still on the economy, *Wonkblog* [says](#) this week that the Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen, and Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, were set to ‘face off’ over how countries should tackle financial instability. This follows criticisms from the IMF of the Fed, over the latter’s continuing stimulus program which they say could destabilize markets in the developing world.

### **And finally...**

This week, *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that the Twitter account @Scotusblog, which is an independent blog site covering the Supreme Court, was subject to angry reactions and trolling in reaction the Supreme Court’s decisions. Their response? Trolling right back.

Using conference calls as a measure of business productivity, *The Atlantic* [finds](#) this week that America’s World Cup soccer matches dropped workplace productivity by up to 11 percent.

Finally, given that today is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that 97 percent of the \$4 million worth of U.S. flags imported last year were made in China.

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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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