

Rick Perry's glasses, Obama acts on Iraq, and should cities say no to casinos? – US national blog round up for 2 – 8 August

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

Despite the Congressional recess, this week was a busy one for Republicans and Democrats alike, with a number of important primary races across the states and some interesting developments for potential presidential candidates from across both sides of the aisle.

On Saturday, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that the White House has issued a statement condemning House Republicans for putting forward legislation that would allocate money towards deporting those who came to the U.S. illegally as children (so called 'DREAMers'), rather than deporting dangerous criminals. They say that the Obama Administration has also admonished the GOP for their desire to freeze the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which prioritises the resources of the Department of Homeland Security away from deporting DREAMers. *Red State* [characterises](#) Obama's criticism of the GOP's bill as a 'tantrum', writing that the House actually passed a clean bill that would address the immediate problem, and did not reward Obama for his 'lawlessness' by appropriating a large amount of money.

Staying with the Democrats, *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that Debbie Dingell, the wife of retiring Congressman, John Dingell, won her Michigan Democratic Primary this week to succeed her husband. They say that if Mrs. Dingell wins her seat in November (which seems very likely), she will be the third member of that family to hold the seat since her husband's father first took it in 1932. They say that Dingell's five decades of service without facing a serious challenger are a good argument in favor of Congressional term limits, and show the problem of political family dynasties.

Several potential Republican candidates for the 2016 presidential election were in the news this week. On Saturday, the *National Journal* writes on what they say is Senator Rand Paul's (KY) 'audacious outreach'. They [say](#) that Paul's innovation is the way that he is courting African-Americans with his policies for criminal justice reform such as changing drug and sentencing laws which disproportionately affect minority men. This week was not all good news for Rand Paul – on Tuesday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that Paul was stopped at an Iowa fundraiser by two DREAMers, but that he immediately 'ran away', leaving Representative Steve King (R-IA) to 'fend for himself'.

National Journal took a long look at the 'new' Rick Perry, the Governor of Texas, this week, [writing](#) that Perry's new 'nerd-chic' glasses are actually necessary, and not part of an attempt by the Governor to change his appearance ahead of the 2016 election. They do say that Perry has learned from his 2012 shot at the GOP nomination, and is now 'trying to check all the boxes he missed'. On Wednesday, *The Hill's Congress Blog* [looks](#) at a less-mentioned potential candidate: former Arkansas Governor and 2008 presidential hopeful, Mick Huckabee. They say that Huckabee is a serious candidate for 2016 because he would do well against the potential Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, with polls giving him nearly 41 percent of the vote, second only to Congressman Paul Ryan (R-WI).

Moving on to the coming midterm elections in November, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) this week that the GOP has 'forever lost the Hispanic vote due to the racist attitude of its Tea Party wing. They write that Republican policies, such as the immigration bill put forward at the end of last week show that they are only appealing to the most conservative parts of the American population. On Monday, the *National Journal* [looks](#) at the nine primary races to watch this week, as voters in six states head to the polls. Later in the week, *The Atlantic* says that Justin Amash's victory in the primary race for Michigan's 3rd Congressional District is [important](#) because he is a staunch opponent of the National Security Agency's (NSA) mass surveillance of Americans, and that it shows that Republicans who want to

rein in the NSA can win primary votes.

Most commentators acknowledge that the Democratic Party has virtually no chance of retaking the House of Representatives in the fall. *Outside the Beltway* goes one further, [writing](#) that new research shows that it will be hard for the Democrats to retake the House this decade because the number of swing seats has nearly halved to 90 since the late 1990s.

Looking at the Senate mid-terms this week, *FiveThirtyEight* [writes](#) on Monday that the GOP is still favored to win control of the body in the fall. They say that the 33

Class II Senators who are up for reelection come from states that gave President Obama an average of 46 percent of the vote in 2012, and are currently overrepresented because of the Democratic 'wave' in 2008. Meanwhile *Roll Call's At the Races* [looks](#) at the ten most vulnerable Senators, including incumbents from Montana, Arkansas, Louisiana and North Carolina, among others.



Congressman Justin Amash of Michigan Credit: [Gage Skidmore](#) (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Monday, *The American Prospect* [writes](#) on the differences between how Democrats and Republicans in safe seats act in Congress. They say that Republicans in safe seats (often Tea Partiers) tend to be more demanding than their Democratic counterparts because they are more likely to have been in the party for many years, while the more conservative Republicans are more likely to be newer members. They say that even though liberal Democrats may disagree with their party's leadership, they will still vote to support it when it counts. On Wednesday, *Outside the Beltway* [gives](#) further evidence of GOP dysfunction – House Republicans were unable to muster the votes last week to pass a resolution honoring Pope Francis. They say that the Pope may be viewed as being too liberal by many political conservatives.

Crooks & Liars [reports](#) this week that the House Intelligence Committee will soon report its findings on the attack on the U.S. outpost in Benghazi in 2012. They say that their report will conclude that there was no deliberate wrongdoing by the Obama Administration, and that no-one was misled. Moving across to the Senate, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Tuesday that the Chairwoman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), has said that the Committee's 280 page summary of their 6,300 page report on the Central Intelligence Agency's use of torture and rendition will not be released until the White House changes redactions of key facts it has made to the report.

On Wednesday, the *Brennan Centre for Justice* [marks](#) the 49th anniversary of the signing of the Voting Rights Act by arguing that Congress needs to modernize and strengthen the Act in the wake of last year's Supreme Court Ruling which 'gutted' it. They say that Congress 'left town' without moving forward on a bipartisan bill introduced in January,

On Wednesday, *The Daily Signal* writes that while many people think that the national debt of \$17.6 trillion is large, the entitlements 'deficit' of unfunded Medicare and Social Security obligations is even larger, at \$49 trillion. They [write](#) that if Congress does nothing to stop excessive spending growth, then Medicare and Social Security recipients will see their benefits cut drastically after 2030.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Monday, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that in an interview with *The Economist* magazine, President Obama has gone on a 'factually inaccurate rant' about Russia. They say that the President has shirked blame for the crumbling state of U.S.-Russia relations, and that his statements about life expectancy and immigration in Russia are just not true. *Wonkblog* [reports](#) on further developments in the U.S.-Russia relationship, writing on Thursday that Russia has announced a ban on food imports from the U.S. in retaliation for the sanctions imposed on it. The ban is expected to cost \$1 billion for the U.S., with the poultry industry especially hard hit.

This week President Obama attended a U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington DC. *The Daily Signal* [uses](#) the opportunity to give seven ways that the Obama Administration can help Africa, including shifting development aid towards the treatment of HIV/AIDS and tropical diseases, reforming America's food assistance programs and promoting security cooperation in the region.

On Thursday *National Journal* [looks](#) at President Obama's likely intervention by the U.S. in Iraq. They say a limited role, such as airstrikes (which were announced shortly afterwards) against ISIS forces, and a clearly defined mission are best option for the President at this point, given a skeptical and war-weary public.

Obamacare and health policy

On Sunday, *The Daily Signal* looks at the recent decision by a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals of the Washington DC Circuit to strike down Obamacare's subsidies for those using the Federal Exchange. They say that President Obama believes that the full Court of Appeals will support the subsidies because he 'hand-packed' it himself. They say that if the full D.C Circuit overturns the decision, then Obama and Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid (D-NV) will get they wanted following the latter's change of the Senate rules to eliminate the filibuster for judicial nominees last year.

On Tuesday, *The Lonely Conservative* [writes](#) that those Americans who want to auto-enroll in their current Obamacare policy may be in for a shock, as new plans come online. These new plans may include far lower subsidies, meaning higher premiums – something that consumers will not find out until they get their bills in the mail.

Recent years have been characterized by a slowdown in healthcare spending in the U.S. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Monday that seventy percent of the slowdown is down to the recession, but that the other thirty percent is due to structural changes in the healthcare system. They say that this means that once the economy recovers, healthcare spending may not return to its previous levels.

Meanwhile, *RedState* [wonders](#) whether or not the federal government will be able to protect Americans from the Ebola outbreak currently taking place in parts of Africa. They criticize the Centre for Disease Control for waiting so long to provide airlines with guidelines on handling Ebola.

The economy and society

On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at the surprising number of people who change their race and ethnicity from one Census to the next. They say that new research shows that 8.3 percent of the 2000 Census population had changed their identity in this way by 2010. They say that those who identified as Hispanic or First Nations, Alaskan and Hawaiian natives were more likely to change their identities.

The Feed [writes](#) this week on the \$11 billion that the Obama Administration has 'poured' into high speed rail projects since 2009. They say that there have been no notable improvements in speed despite the investment, and that it will take many tens of billions of dollars to make any real improvements.



Casino in Atlantic City Credit: [Robert Bruce Murray III](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0](#))

Many policymakers are looking for effective ways revive local economies shattered by decades of manufacturing decline and by the Great Recession. *The Atlantic* [says](#) that one way not to do this is to build casinos. They write that casino revenues have not yet recovered from their 2007 peak, and that these weak earnings are being divided amongst ever multiplying numbers. They say that cities are authorizing more casinos to gain revenues, but that they often have dire social and economic impacts.

On Thursday this week, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that 12 states are suing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for their recent restrictions on coal-fired power plants. They say that the EPA has overstepped its legal boundaries under the Clean Air Act, and that coal-country states such as West Virginia are concerned about job major job losses as a result of the regulations.

Hit & Run [looks](#) at new research that finds that being made aware of the disproportionately black composition of America's prisons, increases peoples support for intrusive policing and sentencing policies. They say that exposure to racial disparities may actually make the public less responsive to efforts to lessen the severity of those policies.

The crisis of undocumented immigrant children at the U.S.-Mexico border has been a growing one in recent weeks and months. *FiveThirtyEight* [writes](#) that American opinion is split on the child migrant crisis because of partisan and educational differences and people's differing reactions to language divides.

And finally...

Wonkblog [reports](#) somewhat incredulously that the Senate not only has a barbershop, but also that federal spending on it has fallen by more than 50 percent in the past three years.

The *National Journal* makes a spirited defense of the 'uncoolness' of Washington DC, after the city was voted the 'coolest' in a recent *Forbes Magazine* feature.

Hit & Run [gives](#) the history of the Food and Drug Administration's attempts since 1997 to regulate the Tic Tac, and other breath fresheners. It's all about portion size, apparently.

Featured [image](#): Governor Rick Perry of Texas. Credit: [Gage Skidmore](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-SA-2.0](#))

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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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