

## The militarization of police, Obama on vacation, and is another government shutdown in the pipeline? – US national blog round up for 16 – 22 August

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

This week saw riots and protests in the Missouri town of Ferguson continue, and growing discussions over the militarization of police forces and race and inequality in society. The conflict in Iraq was also in the news, with the murder of American journalist James Foley by the extremist group, Islamic State.

### President Obama, the Democratic Party, the GOP and elections

On Monday, *United Liberty* [reports](#) that President Obama interrupted his vacation in Martha's Vineyard on the weekend to meet with advisers about the violence in Ferguson, Missouri. They say that while some of the criticism leveled at Obama over his vacation is unfair – given that he receives briefings and makes decisions no matter where he is – images of Obama playing golf amidst domestic and international crises fuel the notion that he has checked out of his job. Meanwhile, *The Lonely Conservative* writes that as Obama has been on vacation, White House staffers have been busy working with lobbyists, creating executive orders. They [say](#) that Obama's increasing appetite for unilateral action has emboldened activists and businesses to 'flock' to the administration with their own policy lists.

The potential Democratic nominee for president in 2016, Hillary Clinton, was in the news again this week. *United Liberty* [writes](#) that she is under fire over her speaking fees and book deals, which have netted her more than \$4 million. They say that as Clinton is trying to portray herself as a populist, and in tune with the economic struggles of ordinary voters – something which may be difficult to do given her recent earnings. On Thursday, *The Atlantic* writes that while there is still some speculation over whether or not Clinton will run in 2016, the real mystery is why she has no real competition. They [say](#) that an



Hillary Clinton Credit: Brent Danley (CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0)

essentially uncontested primary race for a non-incumbent would be unprecedented in recent U.S. history, and that Clinton's power is her ability to instil fear in other potential candidates – fear that she would commit to doing political harm to any of her challengers.

Moving over to the Republican side, *The American Prospect* [writes](#) on the tendency for high-level Republicans such as Senator Rand Paul (KY) and Texas Governor, Rick Perry, to state that decisions on gay marriage should be left to the states, and not decided at a federal level. They say that these stances are a 'safe harbor' for

politicians, and a way of not taking too much of a risk, when they know that their positions may have to change in a few years' time in order to catch up with public opinion.

Last Friday Texas Governor Rick Perry was indicted for trying to intimidate a District Attorney into resigning. *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that Texas Senator Ted Cruz has stated that he stands by Perry; something that they say may drag him down as well if Perry is found guilty. Meanwhile, *National Journal* is much more [positive](#) about Perry's indictment, writing that it may be a blessing for him. They say that what at first appeared to be a gross abuse of power now seems more reasonable, given the conduct of the DA in question, Rosemary Lehmberg, who was caught drunk driving. Perry may actually gain favor with voters as GOP activists are using the indictment to paint him as someone who is standing up against what they say is an unfair system. Perry must certainly be doing something right – he is now the GOP's frontrunner for the presidential nomination in 2016, writes *Red State*. They [say](#) that way that Perry's team has handled the indictment show that he is likely to ride into the top spot in the 2016 Republican primary.

On Tuesday, *PoliticusUSA* writes that the GOP is losing out to the Democrats in funding ahead of this year's mid-term elections in November. They [say](#) that the Democrats have been able to raise \$27 million more than Republicans in their Senate campaign, in part because of GOP House Speaker John Boehner's lawsuit, and the demands for impeachment that have come from Republicans like former Vice-Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin. *Crooks & Liars* writes this week that Democrats are taking up the fight against money – big money in politics that is. They [say](#) that Democrats such as House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (CA) are pushing clean money campaigns and to have the Citizens United Supreme Court decision overturned.

### **Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda**

The protests and disorder that have wracked Ferguson, Missouri for the last two weeks have reached the national stage, and have sparked debates over the militarization of local police forces. On Monday, *The America Prospect* [says](#) that since the program began in 1990, the Department of Defense has given \$4.3 billion worth of excess arms and ammunition to police departments, including 500 vehicles designed to withstand armor-piercing roadside bombs. Meanwhile, *Daily Kos* writes that Congress now needs to do something about this militarization of police. They [say](#) that while the issue came up in the House two months ago, Democrats and Republicans voted to continue funneling military equipment to local police departments, with only 62 legislators voting to curtail the program. On Tuesday, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that Attorney General, Eric Holder, ahead of visiting the city, has written a heartfelt letter to the people of Ferguson. In his letter, Holder promises that the federal investigation into the shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer, which sparked the riots, will be fair and thorough.

This week, *National Journal* looks at party unity in the current Congress. They [say](#) that a 'bevy' – 58 House and 40 Senate members – of endangered Democrats and Republicans have voted against their party in at least one of every ten votes since the beginning of 2013. *Occasional Planet* also [looks](#) at Congress this week, writing on Tuesday that the 'do-nothing Congress' has cost American taxpayers billions following last year's government shutdown, the wrangling over the debt ceiling (which led to a credit downgrade), as well as the GOP's investigations into Benghazi and the IRS. Meanwhile, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that House Republicans are ready to go back on a previous agreement to fund the government. They say that the current fight is on the length of the continuing resolution that Congress must pass to keep the government funded beyond October 1<sup>st</sup>. They say that the GOP are considering a measure that expires in 2015, rather than in December, as desired by Democrats, who want a shorter measure so they can get a measure that will fund the government until late 2015. While the GOP is likely to control both the House and Senate by then, that would leave them with little time to get anything done in the lead up to the 2016 presidential election. Echoing this, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that the present Senate Minority Leader, Mitch McConnell (R-KY), has promised more showdowns and shutdowns if the Republican Party does win back the Senate in the November mid-term elections. They say that while this is no surprise, given the GOP's desire to shape the agenda for the coming 2016 presidential election, this strategy may not help them, as the public already has a low opinion of Congress.

On Thursday, *The American Prospect* [looks](#) at Congressional Democrats' relationship with President Obama. They say that while there have been some complaints from Hill Democrats that the President does not socialize with them enough, this is not enough for them to vote against his legislative agenda.

## Foreign policy, defense and trade

Earlier this month, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave an interview to *The Atlantic*, where she criticized Obama's foreign policy, especially his decision not to arm the Free Syrian Army. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that Clinton is wrong, and Obama right, given America's previous 'abysmal failures' in arming rebel groups. *United Liberty* also [looks](#) at the topic of American intervention overseas, writing that Pentagon has a \$43 billion 'slush fund', the Overseas Contingency Operations budget which has such a broad remit, it could be used for any number of military activities overseas.

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at the recent release of a memo, penned by David Barron, who is now a judge on the First Circuit Court of Appeals, which gave President Obama legal cover to carry out extrajudicial killings. They say that the seven-page memo was a 'woefully incomplete' legal analysis and calls into question Barron's appointment to the Court of Appeals.

On Tuesday, the Islamic State extremist group in Iraq uploaded a video showing the execution of American journalist, James Foley. *Roll Call's Five by Five* [looks](#) at how President Obama could respond to Foley's murder. They say that given the administration's rejection of 'boots on the ground', Obama's options seem limited, beyond closer working with Kurdish and Iraqi Security Forces, and the Justice Department's criminal investigation into Foley's death. On Thursday, *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that the Islamic State's activity in Iraq may actually help to improve U.S. relations with Iran. They say that Islamic State are a common threat to both countries, and that the two countries could work together to end the threat.

## Obamacare and health policy

Many commentators have been worried about the so called 'sticker shock' that some people who have auto-enrolled in Obamacare, may soon experience. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that as the marketplace brings in new insurance companies and rates, their plans may rise in price, and gives a guide to the complex terminology and policy options from PPOs (preferred provider organizations), to POS' (point of service plans).

On Wednesday, *The Lonely Conservative* reports what they say is 'more bad news' for Obamacare, writing that a recent U.S. Treasury audit has shown that the medical device tax introduced under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has brought in less money than had been envisaged. They [say](#) that this raises questions about the government's ability to manage the other taxes that were included in the ACA to help pay for it. Meanwhile, *Liberty Street Economics* [reports](#) this week on their monthly survey of firms, which recently asked about how Obamacare has affected their health coverage costs. They say that the median firm expected costs to increase by ten percent next year, and that a majority of firms felt that it had increased health benefit costs per worker by at least a small amount.

*Wonkblog* looks at the growing problem of healthcare data breaches. They [write](#) that in the last four years, data breaches have affected more than 30 million people over 944 incidents. The breaches cover theft, data loss, hacking and unauthorized accessing of accounts.

## The economy and society

On Sunday *RedState* [looks](#) at the ongoing disorder in Ferguson, against the background of the social contract



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and the authority of the state of the individual. They say that the shooting of Michael Brown and subsequent riots has its roots in the breakdown of a social contract that has long served to prevent minor infractions (such as jaywalking, which is alleged to have begun the incident that led to Brown being shot) escalating needlessly. *FiveThirtyEight* uses Ferguson to highlight the lack of good data on how many Americans are killed by the police every year. They [write](#) that it may be around 400, according to FBI sources, but that this data has many limitations, such as not containing any information on victims or offenders. On Thursday, *The Atlantic* [examines](#) why it is so difficult for whites to understand the disorder in Ferguson. They say that only 40 percent of whites say that Brown's shooting is part of a broader pattern, compared to 76 of black respondents. They say that this lack of understanding may be down to the fact that white Americans live in communities that face far fewer problems, and that their social networks are 93 percent white.

On Sunday, *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at how much Americans are taxed, writing that between state, local, and federal taxes, almost one in three dollars of a worker's earnings goes to taxes, and are, for many households, the largest expenditure in the family budget. Meanwhile, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that 36 percent of Americans have nothing saved for their retirement, writing that this may be down to the large chunk of income taken up by Social Security taxes.

More than 120,000 Americans are in need of an organ transplant, with only around 29,000 transplants happening annually. *The Atlantic* [examines](#) a new way to potentially boost donations – to just continue to ask people. They write that if people are asked more than once to register as an organ donor, they have a greater chance of becoming one.

Common Core is a controversial education policy which seeks to establish consistent educational standards across the states. *United Liberty* [writes](#) that there is a growing movement in Congress and state legislatures to fight the initiative, accusing President Obama of 'dangling federal [stimulus] money over states' to get them to adopt the policy. They say that while much of the opposition has been driven by conservative and Tea Party activists, a growing number of teaching unions are beginning to voice their displeasure with the standards and implementation efforts.

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

*The Atlantic* [examines](#) the sorrows and joys of endless email and 24-hour connectivity that now goes with many working environments.

*Wonkblog* [looks](#) at how America fell out of love with canned tuna – with sales reaching their lowest levels in 15 years.

Is \$100 actually \$100? Not between states, [writes](#) the *The Daily Signal*. They write that the real purchasing power of \$100 across each state (based on the national average) can be as low as \$84.60 in Washington DC, and as high as \$113.38 in South Dakota.

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