

Midterm polling, the Supreme Court's same-sex marriage non-decision, and concern over Ebola: US national blog round up for 4 – 10 October

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.

President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

Last week, President Obama stated that his policies were on the ballot for the upcoming midterm elections. While he has been criticized by many for the comments (including by some in the Democratic Party), *PoliticusUSA* goes to the President's defense, [writing](#) on Sunday that since Obama's policies have included job creation and wage growth, this is something Democrats should be proud of, especially given their popularity with voters. While some of his economic policies may well be popular, the President himself is not, reports *The Lonely Conservative*. They [say](#) that 32 percent of voters want to send Obama a message of opposition, higher than they did against President George W. Bush in 2008. *American Thinker* is similarly [critical](#) of Obama, writing this week that he has gone out of his way to flout his disregard the dangers posed by the U.S. 'porous border' given the apparent threat of Ebola. Meanwhile, *Talking Points Memo* [examines](#) how threats against Barack Obama have evolved over the course of his presidency. They say that these threats have morphed from overtly racial ones at the beginning of his presidency to those that now focus on assertions that he has overstepped his constitutional authority.

With the midterm elections now less than a month away, *PoliticusUSA* looks at what they say is the Republican Party's 'battle' on early voting. They write that the GOP hates early voting (and is trying to restrict it), because it is mostly used by people who live in districts that lack the resources to accommodate voter demand on Election Day. Meanwhile, *Wonkblog* [examines](#) whether or not Republicans are the new 'doves', saying that the growing influence of Kentucky Senator, Rand Paul, may signal a new noninterventionist trend amongst the GOP. They write that this may be true, but only up to a point, as Republicans are simply just skeptical of the gains from the protracted wars that the U.S. has been involved in over the past decade. On Tuesday this week, *Outside the Beltway* says that those who are ready to write off the Tea Party are jumping the gun. They [say](#) that while the Tea Party has largely failed to get its candidates onto the ballot during this election cycle, its backers have built up powerful fundraising machines, which will be ready to put their weight into the 2016 presidential race as soon as the midterms are over.



With the 2016 presidential election in mind, *National Journal* [writes](#) on a speech given by the Republican Governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal, on foreign policy. They say Jindal's call for a buildup of America's military forces has positioned him on the hawkish end of the GOP's spectrum. *RedState* [looks](#) at another potential candidate on the GOP side – Senator Lindsay Graham of South Carolina. They are particularly damning, writing

that he is the worst possible GOP candidate for 2016 given that he is a 'fake hawk', with very little substance. On Wednesday, *American Thinker* [dismisses](#) another potential candidate, former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush. They write that while he is likable, he is not likely to produce the 'radical, but legal, conservative revolution' that they say America needs. They say that Bush would be much better off running for a Florida Senate seat. This week, *National Journal* [writes](#) that Texas GOP Senator, Ted Cruz, has been particularly vocal after the Supreme Court decided on Monday not to hear same-sex marriage appeals from several states. They say that unlike many Republicans, Cruz (who is believed to have 2016 presidential ambitions), put out a statement blasting the decision as 'tragic and indefensible'. They say that Cruz is setting himself apart from potential opponents who have hedged on the issue.

The Midterm elections

With only a few weeks to go before this year's midterm elections, speculation and commentary on key races, especially in the Senate, continued to ramp up. *Political Animal* [writes](#) that control of the Senate might come down to the result in Kansas, where incumbent GOP Senator, Pat Roberts, is now trailing Independent Greg Orman. Given that some polling shows that the Republicans may end up with 50 seats, who Orman decides to support may be key. *FiveThirtyEight* on the other hand writes this week that control of the Senate may come down to [Whole Foods vs Cracker Barrel](#). They say that Democratic voters tend to shop at the former, and Republicans, the latter, and that their locations tend to be an 'uncanny' indicator of where parties gain and lose voters. They say that most of the top 12 Senate races are in Cracker Barrel country, rather than Whole Foods.

Turning to more traditional polling measures, the *Monkey Cage* [writes](#) on Monday that new midterm forecasts are bullish about the GOP's chances of retaking the Senate. *PoliticusUSA* meanwhile [reports](#) that new local polls in Kentucky, North Carolina, Colorado, and Michigan all show close Senate races leaning towards the Democrats. Meanwhile, *RedState* [writes](#) that the GOP appears to be struggling in a year that should be to their advantage. They say that the current polls are closer than the Republican Party should want because the National Republican Senatorial Committee has not openly engaged in many of these races, and attacked outside conservative groups, and the GOP's base.

On Tuesday, *Roll Call's At the Races* takes a [look](#) at six gubernatorial races that they say may have Congressional consequences. They write that efforts by Republicans in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kansas and Michigan to get out the vote could help their House candidates in those states.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at what might happen if the Republicans are able to retake the Senate after the midterm elections. They say that the lack of a vision for the future on the part of House Speaker, John Boehner, and Senate Republican Leader, Mitch McConnell, mean that the GOP may have little to offer to fix the problems facing the U.S. and the world. They may not even get the chance to do that, [writes](#) *The Atlantic* this week. They say that their control of the chamber may be in jeopardy as their majority may be very narrow, and Mitch McConnell's position may be under threat.



Commentators often slam Senators for their lack of attendance at committee hearings and other meetings. *Roll Call's At the Races* [writes](#) this week that these attacks are usually 'bogus', given that most legislation is developed outside of hearing rooms, with staffers covering hearings.

One of the biggest news items this week was the Supreme Court's non-decision on gay marriage. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the Supreme Court decided on Monday that appeals against rulings on same sex marriage decisions from lower Circuit Courts would not be heard, effectively meaning that the lower court's rulings that such bans are unconstitutional now stand. They say that this means that same sex marriage will soon be legal in 30 states, with more to come. *The Daily Signal* [responds](#) to the Supreme Court's non-decision saying that it is a setback for constitutional self-government and a 'healthy marriage culture'. They say that the five state's laws (which ban same sex marriage) reflect the truth about marriage, and were passed with overwhelming democratic support. On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [reports](#) that Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy has temporarily blocked a federal appeals court ruling that struck down same sex marriage bans in Idaho and Nevada.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Saturday, *PoliticusUSA* [looks](#) at why they say Neo-Conservatives are so anxious to put 'boots on the ground' to fight the forces of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They say that for neocons, the only way for the U.S. to prove its superiority is through its military might. They write that this 'neocon mindset' is a threat to America's modern democracy, as their platform in the media is convincing people that a ground war with ISIS would be a good thing. *The American Interest* takes [a close look](#) at the developing conflict, writing that the U.S. needs to act quickly to stop ISIS from overrunning the Kurds in the border town of Kobani. They say if Kobani falls, America's anti-ISIS strategy will be on the line. *Caffeinated Politics* [writes](#) that the U.S. needs to rethink its use of ground troops now that Kobani is close to falling. They write that a military win against ISIS (to prevent more civilian deaths) may require the deployment of such troops.

Hit & Run has an interesting [graphic](#) showing the declining number of U.S. coalition partners in Iraq, starting at 39 for the first Gulf War, falling to 31 for the Iraq War of 2003, and now standing at only 14 in the conflict against ISIS.

On Tuesday this week, *Political Animal* [looks](#) at the new memoirs from former CIA Director, Leon Panetta. They say that Panetta is 'cashing in' by giving the impression in interviews that President Obama made a mistake in not leaving combat troops in Iraq, and fighting for higher defense spending.

Obamacare and health policy

The threat of the Ebola virus dominated much health policy commentary this week. On Monday, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that Americans aren't panicking over the virus, with a poll showing that 67 percent were not concerned about it. As the week continued, and an Ebola patient on U.S. soil (who later died), was confirmed, *Wonkblog* [looked](#) at why hospital emergency rooms are bracing for an Ebola panic. They say that there have been at least 5,000 Ebola false alarms this week, and that there are likely to be many unnecessary trips to hospitals by the worried well, as was the case with swine flu in 2009.

This year's Obamacare enrollment period begins in the middle of November. With this in mind, *Occasional Planet* [writes](#) that this time around, healthcare shoppers will have more options, as more health insurance companies across the states are offering plans under the scheme. *Hit & Run* is [less positive](#) about Obamacare, writing on Monday that Obamacare's penalties for hospital readmissions are working, but with the tradeoff that those that are fined are often those with the poorest patients.

The Daily Signal [reports](#) this week that restaurants in Los Angeles have started adding a 3 percent surcharge on their diners' bills in order to cover their employee's health insurance. Walmart has made a far bigger change to its policies in reaction to Obamacare, reports *The Atlantic* on Tuesday. They [write](#) that this week the company has decided to cut off healthcare for 30,000 of its employees who work fewer than 30 hours a week. They say that while Walmart's move may be cold-hearted, its workers may end up getting similar plans to their previous ones, but for less money on the state and federal Obamacare exchanges.

The economy and society

On Saturday, *Political Animal* [comments](#) on a recent report that has found that while employment is on the rise, wages remain stagnant. They say that without workers making a decent wage, demand will be depressed, hurting the economy further. On Thursday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that new figures from the Congressional Budget Office

this week show that at \$486 billion, the deficit is the smallest since 2008. They say that despite this good news, the budget deficit is primed to grow, as spending on entitlements such as Obamacare and Social Security continue to rise.

Are some types of states more charitable than others? [According](#) to *The Lonely Conservative* this week, Red States tend to be more generous, while those states that voted for Barack Obama in 2012 are the stingiest. Generous or not, many Americans think that poor people do not work hard enough, writes *Wonkblog* on Thursday. They [say](#) a quarter of the country believes that inequality exists because some work harder than others.

On Monday, the *Monkey Cage* [says](#) that while many more gay people can legally be married as of this week, they can still be legally fired in five of these states for being married. They say that this circumstance is generally out of line with public opinion, mostly top do with the differences between marriage and employment law. Meanwhile, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [writes](#) this week that we may now be in sight of the end of the legal struggle over same sex marriage, as the Supreme Court is now likely to make a ruling invalidating same sex marriage bans nationwide in the near future. *The Daily Signal* [responds](#) to the Supreme Court's non-decision this week, writing that the defense of marriage is not over, and that it is too important to allow non-elected judges to redefine it without a fight, and that conservatives should continue their legal battles and make the case for marriage.

And finally...

This week, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at how astronauts vote from space – via an encrypted PDF ballot.

The Volokh Conspiracy [says](#) that a new survey has found that 33 percent of Americans think the government spends the most on foreign aid, even though it is among the smallest budget spending items.

Wonkblog [looks](#) at GOP House Speaker John Boehner's latest jobs plan – it fits on a single tweet:

Featured [image](#): Supreme Court Chamber Credit: [Phil Roeder](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-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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