

## Obama the veto-less, Senator Coburn's Wastebook, and what counts as a GOP wave?: US national blog round up for 18 – 24 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

On Sunday, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that President Obama has been forced 'to waste precious time' calming nerves created by increasing media hysteria over the Ebola virus. They say that rather than talking about jobs, the economy, or other important issues, the Obama White House had to send public health officials to appear on the Sunday morning shows to allay people's fears about the risks posed by Ebola to the American people. They say that the public should be outraged by the media's campaign to 'terrify people over Ebola. Last week saw the announcement of an 'Ebola czar' by the White House in the form of Ron Klain. On Monday, the *White House Dossier*, [writes](#) that Klain is likely to be in line for a more senior position further down the line as a 'White House consigliere'.

*The American Prospect* [writes](#) on Thursday that if the GOP takes the Senate in November's midterm elections, then President Obama is very likely to issue more vetoes over the next two years. They note that Obama has only vetoed two bills thus far – fewer than any other President in recent history. What has President Obama's impact been on the Democratic Party? *Roll Call's Rothenblog* [looks](#) at whether or not the President will leave the Party better than he found it, writing that after the midterms, it may well fall back to the levels of support and power that it had before Obama took office. This week saw another White House 'fence jumper', reports *Outside the Beltway*. They [say](#) that this time the intruder was quickly apprehended by the Secret Service, and did not get near to the White House.

This week Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts gave an interview that has since caused renewed speculation as to whether she is considering a 2016 presidential bid, [writes](#) *National Journal*. While Warren has previously stated fairly unequivocally that was not running for president, now she has said that "there are amazing doors that could open".

Turning to the Republican Party, this week Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey has come under criticism for his statement

that the GOP needs to win Governors mansions in order to control "voting mechanisms" and ensure accurate vote counts in those states, [writes](#) *Crooks & Liars*. Speaking over Governors, with 28 up for reelection in this year's midterms, the *Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at who we might want to watch with 2016 in mind. Leading the pack are New York's Andrew Cuomo, New Mexico's Susana Martinez and Scott Walker of Wisconsin. One member of the Republican Party who is almost certain to run for President in 2016 is Texas Senator, Ted Cruz. This week



Elizabeth Warren Credit: Newshour (CC-BY-NC 2.0)

*National Journal* [writes](#) that Cruz has released a plan for what his fellow congressional Republicans should prioritize in 2015. They say that his points on repealing Obamacare and simplifying the tax system are a preview of what his policies may be if he does run in 2016. This week, *The Atlantic* looks at another potential GOP presidential contender for 2016 – Texas Governor Rick Perry. They [say](#) that in contrast to the neo-isolationist Senator Rand Paul (KY), Perry has very good foreign policy credentials – he has not contributed to budgets that will shrink the size of U.S. armed forces, and his adversarial relationship with former President George W. Bush will distance him from that President's infamous foreign policy legacy.

## **The Midterm elections**

On Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [writes](#) that with less than two weeks to go before Election Day, the most likely result is a Republican majority in the Senate. They say that the GOP, may not get to 51 seats until after December 6<sup>th</sup>, when Louisiana has its runoff, or even January 6<sup>th</sup> if Georgia's race goes to a runoff as well. Meanwhile *Roll Call's Rothenblog* looks at what many are asking this week – what counts as a GOP wave in this midterm cycle? They [say](#) a wave election can be generally defined as when an election surge is strong enough to sweep candidates into office who wouldn't generally win. If the GOP gains eight seats this year, that would mean that they would have won three that they would not normally take under neutral circumstances – Colorado, Iowa, and New Hampshire. *PoliticoUSA* takes issue with the idea of a Republican wave this week, writing that recent polls in Kansas and North Carolina show that GOP Senate candidates are not doing as well as had been previously thought. They [say](#) that the Republican Party has failed to turn the midterm campaign into a national referendum on Obama, and as a result it is being contested on a state-by-state basis.

This week commentators looked at the Democrats' standing among groups of voters. On Monday, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that Obama's poor approval ratings are hurting the Democrats in the midterms. They say that while women helped carry Obama to victory in 2008 and 2012, he has seen his approval rating among women drop sharply, especially in battleground states. Meanwhile, *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) that Latinos may well sit out the midterm election in anger over President Obama's stalling over immigration reform. They say that Obama's repeated deferral of action on undocumented immigrants could make a difference in over three dozen races across the country.

A common theme in this midterm election for Democrats is that they have been attempting to distance themselves from President Obama due to his poor approval ratings. They say that despite this, a recent study has shown that vulnerable Democrats overwhelmingly agree with the President's positions, [writes](#) *Wonkblog*. Staying on the Democrats, *The Federalist* [wonders](#) this week if Democrats always win statewide elections that are close. Looking at recent data, they find that Democrats won 20 out of 27 of the closest races (decided by less than one percentage point) between 1998 and 2013. They say that when the margin opens to 1-2 points, Democrats only win half of the races. They argue that the data shows that Democrats have had a significant competitive advantage over the past 16 years, and that the Republican Party should take the message that they are not 'getting the job done' in races where the value of political operations is most urgent.

On Thursday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at the role that Independent Senators may play after the midterms. They say that if Greg Orman is able to win in Kansas that will mean that the Senate contains three Independents, which could then lead to the formation of a 'Centrist Caucus', which might moderate the GOP's agenda if they take 50 seats.

Many are concerned about the level of outside spending in U.S. politics, and this year's midterm election is no exception. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the billionaire Koch brothers have bought \$6.5 million worth of advertising to shore up Republican candidates in Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, New Hampshire and North Carolina. This in addition to the \$16 million spend on ads by the Koch's Political Action Committee, Freedom Partners Action Fund, since August.

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

On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [cover](#) what they say is the 'House GOP's new war on incompetence'. They say that when Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy sent a memo to GOP legislators outlining the party's agenda for the next Congress, including restoring 'competence' across scandal plagued departments and agencies, such as the Veterans Administration and the Internal Revenue Service. This week also saw Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma release his fifth annual *Wastebook*, writes *Hit & Run*. The book catalogues 100 'asinine' government expenditures including \$1 billion given to the Pentagon to destroy unneeded ammunition. From spending money to raising it, *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) this week that Obama's tax increase has caused Federal tax revenue to go above \$3 trillion for the first time in history. They say that given the deficit is still nearly \$500 billion, the government clearly spends too much.



On Monday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at the delays in the appointment of a Surgeon General. They say that one year ago Republicans promised to block the nomination of Dr. Vivek Murthy because of his view that gun violence is a public health issue. They write that Republicans consider it to be President Obama's fault that the country does not have a Surgeon General, even after their desire to block the nominee's appointment. Meanwhile, *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) that a Democrat appointed Federal District Judge, Juan Pérez-Giménez, has upheld a law in Puerto Rico that defines marriage as between a man and a woman. They say that Pérez-Giménez is the first Democrat-appointee on the federal bench to uphold marriage law since the Supreme Court's decision on the Defense of Marriage Act last year.

### Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Wednesday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) on a new report that finds that the U.S. has wasted \$7.6 billion on the war on drugs in Afghanistan. They say that the opium poppy crop in the country reached record levels in 2013, and is likely to climb even higher this year.

Meanwhile, with U.S. involvement in the conflict against the forces of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq ongoing, *Roll Call's Five by Five* [says](#) that a majority of Americans support the campaign, but they also do not believe that it is working.

### Obamacare and health policy

Concern over the spread of the Ebola virus in the U.S. continued this week, with many calling for a travel ban. On Monday, the *White House Dossier* writes that instead of appointing Democratic operative, Ron Klain as 'Ebola czar', he should have appointed former GOP Presidential candidate, Mitt Romney. They [say](#) that Romney is a familiar face with a commanding presence, and has experience running a large agency as Governor of Massachusetts. *The Federalist*, [meanwhile](#) has three ways that Ron Klain is similar to Obama's previous 'Ebola czar' – he has been conspicuously absent from recent meeting on Ebola, he has experiences of handing out 'crony' loans to donors who lobby the government, and lacks accountability. On Thursday, *Wonkblog* reports that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has announced a new set of protocols for travelers who have arrived from countries affected by Ebola. They [say](#) a travel ban would only delay the next case of Ebola coming to the U.S., and not for very long.

The second round of open enrollment for the Affordable Care Act ('Obamacare') opens on November 15<sup>th</sup>. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) this week that those who are still without insurance are largely unaware of the upcoming open enrollment and the financial assistance that they may be eligible for. On Friday, *RedState* is critical of Obamacare, [writing](#) that the program is a good example of how a failure can be portrayed as a success, given that its costs have been ignored. They say that by 2024, the government will be spending nearly as much on Medicaid and Obamacare subsidies as they do on national defense. While Obamacare as a whole may not be cheap, on the other hand, recent years have seen a slowdown in Medicare costs. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) this week that we actually have President George W Bush to thank for the falling costs rather than President Obama, due to the prescription drug program enacted by Bush.

## The economy and society

On Thursday, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at groups who want marijuana to be legalized – so that it can be regulated. They say that groups such as Yes on 91 in Oregon want the drug made legal to reduce children's access to it.

*Hit & Run* [writes](#) this week on a new poll that finds that 77 percent of Americans are in favour of eliminating mandatory minimum prison sentences for non-violent offenders, and 73 percent want their voting rights to be restored. They say that, in light of these findings, politicians may well find criminal justice reform to be a winning issues.



On Wednesday this week *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) on a new study that has found that liberals are more likely to 'unfriend' others on Facebook and in real life. They say that 40 percent of liberals had blocked or defriended someone over a political disagreement, compared to just over 30 percent of conservatives.

The Washington Redskins football team has seen controversy in recent months over their name, which many see as being racist towards Native Americans. This week the *Monkey Cage* [writes](#) that while support for the team changing its name is growing, only 14 percent say that it should be changed.

Remember earlier this year when the proposed Keystone XL pipeline which would connect Canadian oil sands to Gulf Coast refineries, was very controversial? *The Feed* [wonders](#) where the controversy went, writing that the issue is no longer being brought up by either side. They say that the Environmental Protection Agency's new regulations for power plant emissions and agitation for a Global Climate Treaty have gained the focus of the green movement, meaning that the project may get federal approval after the midterms.

### And finally...

Having trouble staying calm in the final weeks of the midterm campaign? *Wonkblog* [says](#) that the fundamentals have been set for months, and that the Republicans are generally favored.

With Halloween even closer than the midterms, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) on Tuesday that spending on the festivities will come in at \$7.4 billion this year.

*Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) on John Oliver's solution to the Supreme Court's Camera ban – using animal actors.

Featured [image](#) credit: President Barack Obama meets with advisors in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, Aug. 4, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

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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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