

Giving meaning to the midterms, the cost of cheap gas, and will the GOP Congress ramp up defense spending? : US national blog round up for 1 – 7 November

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

Not all commentary related to the midterm elections this week – on Monday *American Thinker* [looks](#) at President Obama's reaction to the Ebola crisis. They say that Obama is good at implementing bad ideas, in this case making plans to import foreign Ebola patients into the U.S., simply for ideological reasons. Many predict that, tired of Congressional inaction, Obama is likely to legalize millions of undocumented immigrants. *White House Dossier* [writes](#) that legalizing this group could help Hillary Clinton gain the presidency in 2016, if many of these immigrants then vote.

In the lead up to the midterms, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at Obama's poor approval ratings – only 42 percent of Americans approve of his job performance. They say that the President has earned people's disapproval because he presided over the expansion of the U.S. surveillance state, his administration continues with the costly War on Drugs, and he has been aggressive in his persecution of whistleblowers. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) on Tuesday that in the face of a Republican controlled Congress, Obama will struggle to achieve his agenda over the next two years, such as renewing unemployment insurance and raising the minimum wage.

Moving on to the Republican Party, which gained the Senate this week, and increased its House membership to near-unprecedented levels, *Hit & Run* [writes](#) on Wednesday that the party's victory doesn't mean that its identity crisis has been solved. They say that the squabbling that has beset the party between its Tea Party and Establishment wings is not likely to go away, especially given the hawkishness of some new neoconservative senators such as Arkansas' Tom Cotton. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker had a good night on Tuesday, beating a challenge from Mary Burke. *RedState* [writes](#) that Walker's win should be a blueprint for the Republican Party, given that he has managed to turn the state from blue to purple, and now to near-red in a few short years. Much has been made this week on the election of Mia Love, the first Black Republican woman elected to Congress. *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) on Thursday that her election in Utah does not signal the end of the GOP's racism.

On Wednesday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that though GOP Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky was not on the ballot this week, he was still one of the midterms' biggest winners. They say that while the GOP won many races, voters approved left leaning ballot initiatives, such as more lenient marijuana laws. Paul might be able to bring the GOP together with this increasing trend towards social libertarianism as a 2016 presidential candidate. Meanwhile, *Americablog* [says](#) that the Republican's Senate takeover benefits Texas Senator, Ted Cruz the most in the Republican Party, given his ability to whip the House Tea Party contingent into a fury. *The Federalist* has a general look at the GOP's options for the Presidency in 2016 in the wake of the midterms, [saying](#) that former Florida Governor will not run for President, and it is unlikely that New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie will either. *National Journal*, meanwhile, [writes](#) that despite their very good results, the midterm results do not guarantee that the GOP will be equally successful in 2016 – they will have to find a candidate who can shrink the party's disadvantage with women and minority voters.

The Midterm elections

On Sunday, *Hit & Run* [looks](#) at whether or not third party candidates spoil elections, as some have suggested in the context of this week's midterm elections. On Monday, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) that the Democrats

must not be optimistic about the election's results, given that they have not planned any big Election Night parties this year. Meanwhile, *Roll Call's At the Races* [writes](#) that in this year's midterms there are 30 House members running unopposed, and one Senator. Interestingly, many of them are still bringing in fundraising money, such as Senator Jeff Sessions who has raised more than \$1.4million. *The Monkey Cage* [writes](#) this week that the Senate midterms are the most unrepresentative since World War II and are particularly tough for Democrats.

This week, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at donations to state Supreme Court judges' campaigns, writing that according to recent studies, it is cheaper to buy a state judge via political donations than a state Senator. Meanwhile, *The Washington Post* [wonders](#) if 'obscure' local offices, such as sheriffs, and circuit court clerks need to go to a popular vote. They estimate that there are around 540,000 elected officials in the U.S., many of whom which seem to have been arbitrarily decided to be elected positions.

The Daily Signal has a roundup of 17 'bizarre' [polling places](#), including private garages, grocery stores, laundromats, and Mexican restaurants, [while](#) *National Journal* has a compendium of the most memorable ads of this election cycle.

In the lead up to the midterms there was a great deal of debate over new voter ID laws, and the influence that they might have on close election races.

The *Brennan Center for Justice* [writes](#) that in North Carolina, Kansas, the number of people that were disenfranchised was close to the margin of victory for the GOP, while in Florida and Virginia, the margin of victory is very likely to have been exceeded by the number of people who were unable to vote. In the run up to the election, there was some commentary on whether or not the polls were skewed one way or another. It turns out that they were skewed heavily in [favor of the Democrats](#), reports *Daily Kos*, to the tune of nearly 13 points in total.



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

On Thursday, *The American Prospect* [writes](#) that while most observers closely followed Senate races, the Republican Party gained 64 legislative seats in Southern states, and now controls 12 out of 13 state legislatures in the South.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Thursday *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that the average age in the 'new' Senate will be 50, down from 66 currently, and that the House now has a 30-year old Republican from New York, Elise Stefanik. *Outside the Beltway* [ponders](#) this week if we actually need a larger House of Representatives, and looks at a suggestion to increase it in size to 680 so that the average District size would be about 460,000. *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) this week on the GOP's likely choice to chair the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee – Jim Inhofe (R-OK) – who is also a strident denier of global warming.

On Wednesday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the GOP's congressional leaders are making plans for the newly Republican Congress. They say that while Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and House Speaker John Boehner, (R-OH) have stated they want to send bills with bipartisan support to President Obama, they may not have the support of all Republicans and the measures may not have the desired effects. Meanwhile, *Roll Call's Hawkings Here* has five things that could get done in the new era of [divided government](#), including trade liberalization, the extension of corporate tax breaks, and the reduction of federal criminal penalties. Going back to *Wonkblog*, they [say](#) that while President Obama has vetoed fewer bills than any president since Garfield, that might be about to change.

On Tuesday, *The American Interest* [writes](#) that President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry have has a

dispute over who Kerry's deputy at the State Department should be. They say that Obama favors Deputy National Security Adviser Tony Blinken, while Kerry supports Wendy Sherman, the chief U.S. negotiator on the Iran nuclear talks, and undersecretary of state for political affairs.

The Volokh Conspiracy [reflects](#) on Thursday on the decision made by the Sixth Circuit Court to reject constitutional claims for same-sex marriage. They say that the decision will now head to the Supreme Court, something that it will decide on no later than June, 2016, though this could be much earlier if same-sex marriage advocates file petitions immediately in the Court.



Mitch McConnell Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Foreign policy, defense and trade

Informed Comment writes this week on how a Republican Congress might further entangle the U.S. in conflicts in the Middle East. They say that Republicans can put pressure on Obama by allying with powerful lobbyists as well as using journalists to plant a narrative of renewed unconventional nuclear research in Iraq.

On Saturday, *The Hill's Congress Blog* [looks](#) at the reaction of military spouses to President Obama's recent statement that military service members are not volunteers in the context of an extended quarantine period for those service members returning from fighting Ebola in West Africa. On similar lines, *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that the GOP is likely to try to ramp up defense spending 'super-quickly' especially since noted hawk, Senator John McCain (AZ) will soon be the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

On Wednesday, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at how the new iPhone 6 has helped to fuel a record \$44.9 billion trade gap between the U.S. and China.

Obamacare and health policy

On Saturday, *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at whether or not the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) is working. They say that while the decline in the number of people who are uninsured isn't as high as it would seem at first glance, and that more than 2/3 of the gain in coverage is due to the expansion of Medicaid – which is not how Obamacare was sold.

The midterms will undoubtedly have ramifications for healthcare in the U.S. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that Arkansas, Kentucky, and West Virginia have voted to lose Medicaid by voting for Senate candidates who oppose the Affordable Care Act. Meanwhile, *Wonkblog* [says](#) that out of the 23 states that have not yet expanded Medicaid that had gubernatorial elections, only Alaska has elected a candidate who campaigned for its expansion.

PoliticusUSA [reports](#) on Thursday that GOP Senate leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker John Boehner have announced that the new Republican Congress is considering introducing legislation that would define full time employment as a 40-hour week, something that would take away private employer-based health insurance from more than one million Americans.

The economy and society

On Sunday this week, *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) that the Federal Housing Finance Agency is to lower down payment requirements from 5 to 3 percent on many loans that are eligible for federal mortgage insurance

assistance. They say that this is a sign that “Uncle Sam is back in the subprime lending game”, and that the move is creating the conditions that may lead to another housing collapse.

This week, *Occasional Planet* [says](#) that it is time to stop studying what went wrong in the town of Ferguson, Missouri, after the creation of a new commission was announced by Missouri Governor, Jay Nixon. They say that state officials need to listen to the academic institutions and professionals who have already studied the areas racial and economic problems.

In the aftermath of the midterms, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the exit polls showed that 1 percent of Americans believe that the economy is ‘excellent’ at the moment. They say that this is likely to be the 1 percent of households who have a bigger slice of the income pie than at any time since 1928.

Another important midterm result is that two states, Oregon and Alaska, as well as Washington D.C. voted to approve the recreational use of marijuana, [reports Hit & Run](#). They say that even more states are likely to have such measures on the ballot in 2016. Staying on ballot measures, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that four conservative states (Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska and South Dakota), voted to raise the minimum wage this week.

Wages may be going up in some states, but gas is getting cheaper nearly everywhere. *The Atlantic* [says](#) that in many places, gas is under \$3 a gallon. They say that while this is good for American consumers, it could have effects on U.S. international relationships, such as with Russia and the Middle East.

And finally...

The Atlantic [revives](#) a 1915 suffragette pamphlet which makes the case against male suffrage – reason #2. ‘Because no really manly man wants to settle any question otherwise than fighting about it.’”

The Daily Signal [says](#) that several celebrities who recently promoted ‘Rock the Vote’ (Lena Dunham, Whoopi Goldberg, Natasha Lyonne, E.J. Johnson, and Darren Criss), did not actually vote in the last midterm election.

Daily Kos [reminds](#) us how many people actually forget about Election Day – as a prompt to go to the polls.

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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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