

Rand Paul's Pinterest woes, Jeb Bush struggles with family legacy, and Obama warns UK over defense spending: US national blog round up for 14 – 20 February

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

President Obama's November executive action on immigration dominated the news once again this week, with a federal judge issuing an injunction against the action, forcing it to be halted as the ruling is appealed. On Monday, and before the ruling, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on a new poll that finds that only 17 percent of Americans favor the Republican Party's focus on overturning the president's immigration policies. On Tuesday, *Crooks & Liars* [points out](#) that the Texas Judge, Andrew S. Hanen, is a noted Obama immigration hater, who has made comments in the past critiquing the president's deportation policy. *Wonkblog*, meanwhile [looks](#) at why the ruling matters – writing that much of it centers on whether or not Obama had the authority to delay the deportation of 4 million undocumented immigrants.

President Obama also came under fire this week from conservatives after a speech on Wednesday on 'radical extremism' where he failed to mention Islamic extremism. *United Liberty* [says](#) that it is fine for the president to say 'Islamic extremism', and that he should have the courage to do so if it helps moderate Muslims to 'police their own extremists'. Former Mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani was also in the news this week following controversial comments that he does not believe that President Obama 'loves America', because of the way that he says the President was brought up. *The Atlantic* [comments](#) that for the president to meet the demands of those like Giuliani and the Tea Party in terms of loving America, he would have to:

..declare an unabashed belief in American exceptionalism; deploy troops overseas; oppose ISIS and Russian expansionism; and develop an emotional connection with American voters.

The problem is, he has done all of those things.

This week, *National Journal* [examines](#) how Obama has influenced the Democratic Party, and the country as a whole. They conclude that while he has managed to change his party, his push for a progressive legacy helped him to lose control of Congress without actually moving the country to the left at same time.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at attitudes within the GOP on same-sex marriage. They say that new polls show that as 55 percent of Americans support marriage equality, about half of likely Republican caucus voters in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina would find opposition to same-sex marriage unacceptable in a candidate. They say that the changing GOP attitude towards marriage equality is likely because they are realizing that the debate on the issue is essentially over as same-sex marriage becomes legal across the country.

Elections and the road to 2016

On Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [looks back](#) at the role of outside spending in the 2014 Senate elections. They conclude that despite spending millions, outside groups had little or nothing to do with the Republican Party's gains in last year's midterms. Looking ahead to the next Congressional elections, *National Journal* [introduces](#) us to Joe Sestak, a Democrat who may be in the running for Pennsylvania's Senate seat in 2016. The problem is that

despite his credentials, his party doesn't want him to run, feeling that he is a loose cannon, and are now currently seeking a primary challenger.

Former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush sparked commentary this week with a speech on Wednesday outlining his foreign policy stance. *Roll Call's Five by Five* calls Bush 'muddled' on where he stands compared to his brother and father's policies, and that he wants to be pragmatic (like his father George HW), somewhat neoconservative (like George W), and to find a middle ground.

Staying on Jeb Bush, *Hit & Run* reports on Thursday that he has stated that [he does not understand](#)



Jeb Bush Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-2.0)

the debate over the National Security Agency's collection of telephone metadata that has caused so much criticism over the past 18 months. They say that it is unlikely that Bush truly does not understand the program, and that he is trying to tread a fine line by not defending it while still standing by his brother's administration which began it.

Kentucky Senator Rand Paul is becoming well known for his use of social media, often 'trolling' other potential Republican presidential candidates on Twitter. This week Paul was in hot water over his use of Pinterest to troll likely Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton. Paul had set up a board under Clinton's name on the popular website, Pinterest to mock her. Pinterest was not happy about Paul putting up a fake page for a public figure, and took it down, [reports Daily Kos](#).

Townhall looks at another potential GOP presidential candidate – Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. They [say](#) that since Mitt Romney left the presidential field a few weeks ago, Walker's polling has risen to 24 percent, well above any of his rivals. Despite his good showing against Republicans, Walker is likely to face a tough battle for the White House if he gains the nomination. *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that according to more polling, Hillary Clinton is either tied or holds a 7 to 11 point advantage over Walker in the early presidential states of Iowa, New Hampshire and North Carolina. Polling aside, Scott Walker has been criticized recently for failing to complete a college degree. *Political Animal* says that it is a 'phony scandal', and that having a degree is not a prerequisite for becoming president.

On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) in hope of ex-Virginia Senator, Jim Webb, running in the coming Democratic presidential primary. They say that his positions on economic inequality and militarism would benefit the party and the country.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

This week, *The Daily Signal* is [concerned](#) that the Federal Reserve is not currently independent of Congress, given that it often bows to short-term political pressures. They maintain that the Fed is nervous that Congress will pass Senator Rand Paul's bill to audit them, and that it should be put under Congressional authority as well.

On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the Justice Department is getting 'smart' about drug sentencing. They say that drug trafficking charges are on the decline as are the trafficking offenses that carry a mandatory minimum sentence.

The Brennan Centre for Justice [looks at redistricting this week](#) – more specifically on the Supreme Court's potential role. They say that the Court has so far not really weighed in on redistricting (which is generally a state matter), but that two cases in the current term which challenge redistricting in Alabama and Arizona may change that.

The ongoing deadlock over funding the Department of Homeland Security continued in Congress this week, with Democrats refusing to allow a debate on a bill that would fund the agency, but also roll back President Obama's executive actions on immigration. *Red State* [writes](#) that the leadership of Kentucky Senator, Mitch McConnell has failed given that the legislation is stuck in the Senate after being [passed by the House](#), as reported by *Daily Kos*. *Wonkblog* takes a more [overall view](#) on the fight to fund Homeland Security, arguing that it is essentially pointless given that even if the Department does shut down at the beginning of March, only 14 percent of its employees could be furloughed given that the remained are considered vital for national security and would have to work unpaid.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Saturday, *Political Animal* [discusses](#) President Obama's Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), recently submitted to Congress. They say that the debate over the measure, intended to give the all clear to the current military action against ISIS, is simply the latest iteration of a decades-long conflict over the presidency's war powers by Congress. *The Hill's Congress blog* [recommends](#) that Congress does not approve the AUMF, writing that it is too vague, does not give an exit date, and could cost many American lives. On Tuesday, *The Federalist* [chews](#) on comments from State Department spokesperson, Marie Harf, who said this week that the U.S could not win the war against ISIS "by killing them", and that improving countries' economies to give people job opportunities would be more effective in the long term. Their response is that the threat of ISIS is so important that it does require "killing a lot of people".

There has been much controversy over the U.S. relationship with Israel, after Congress – in what some say was a breach of protocol – invited Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu to address the body without consulting the President. *American Thinker* [says](#) that many on the left are 'fearmongering' about relations between the two countries, by warning against Netanyahu criticizing an emerging deal between U.S. and Iran over the latter's nuclear program. They comment that even if Netanyahu were to be critical, Americans would still support Israel. *Townhall* [looks](#) at the bill currently before the Senate to impose sanctions on Iran if the current negotiations fail. They say that the bill is 'toothless' given that it allows the President to negate its provisions whenever he wishes to.

This week, *The American Interest* [reports](#) that President Obama has called out the UK on its defense cuts. They comment that the President has warned Prime Minister David Cameron, that a failure to hit a 2 percent target of GDP for military spending would undermine the military alliance between the two countries.

On Monday, *The Daily Signal* [examines](#) the U.S. relationship with China. They argue that the current policy on China isn't working, and that it needs to "power up" its economic power and public engagement in order to check China and help allies in the Asia-Pacific region.

Obamacare and health policy

On Sunday, *Political Animal* [reports](#) that enrollments for Obamacare have been surging in the south, with some states reporting increases of nearly 100 percent compared with last year. *The American Interest* urges [caution](#) over Obamacare enrollment statistics released by the administration this week. They say that while it has claimed that 11.4 million have selected or renewed insurance, many of these will not carry through to paying premiums. Obamacare's rollout in October of 2013 was characterized by failings that nearly sank the Healthcare.gov website



British Prime Minister David Cameron and President Barack Obama
Medill DC (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

and put the entire reform in jeopardy. *National Review's The Campaign Spot* [states](#) that Healthcare.gov has had some glitches once again that prevented many from signing up for health insurance because their incomes couldn't be verified.

Republicans criticized the Obama administration this week for the Department of Health and Human Service's outreach to churches to encourage more Obamacare signups. While Republicans state that the move is a violation of the separation of church and state, *Perspectives* [recalls](#) that the GOP did exactly the same under the administration of George W. Bush to encourage seniors to sign up for Medicare Part D prescription drug program. On a darker note, *Talking Points Memo* [reminds](#) us that Obamacare is in a



a great deal of jeopardy over the *King v. Burwell* case which begins its oral arguments at the Supreme Court next month. The case could see the subsidies for federal exchanges based in the states thrown out, which could leave millions with far more expensive health insurance.

The economy and society

Are you unemployed, but feeling mobile? *The Daily Signal* has the [ten best and worst states to find a job](#). Top tip – head to North Dakota, and avoid Connecticut. Alternatively, you could apply for a job at Wal-Mart, which has just raised wages for half a million of its employees, [reports PoliticusUSA](#). They say that it is a huge victory for liberals and progressives, which sees many with wages \$1.75 above the federal minimum.

On Wednesday, *Wonkblog* looks at what happens when a metropolitan area – St. Louis – [has too many governments](#). As of last summer, the city contained 91 separate municipalities, with many now strapped for cash due to the duplication of services.

Is the truth out there? According to the *Monkey Cage* [50 percent of Americans believe in conspiracy theories](#), with the biggest predictor being whether or not they believed in the supernatural or the paranormal.

Fuelled by the fracking boom, the U.S. has enjoyed recent increases in the production of crude oil. *Townhall* [reports](#) that this may be about to change and that the nearly 2,000 oil rigs in the country may start to wind down production by year's end due to the massive fall in oil prices.

And finally...

The *Monkey Cage* looks at [when presidents fall – literally](#).

National Review's The Campaign Spot calls Vice-President Joe Biden 'a creeper', after closely touching the Stephanie Carter, the wife of the new Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, during his swearing in ceremony.

Roll Call's Five by Five [clarifies](#) that the Pentagon actually spent \$41.6 million on Viagra last year, rather than the \$500,000 that had previously been reported.

Featured [image](#): Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), Credit: [Stumpsources.org](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-NC-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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