

Walker mum on evolution, Rand Paul praises Eric Holder, and how Jon Stewart changed journalism: US national blog round up for 7 – 13 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

On Monday, *Americablog* [looks](#) at the controversy over comments made by President Obama while he attended the annual National Prayer Breakfast last week. Obama has been criticized for stating that terrible deeds were committed in the name of Christ, including the Crusades and the Inquisition. They say that the ‘firestorm’ over Obama’s comments show that the National Prayer Breakfast shouldn’t exist, as it is a demonstrably Christian event. President Obama was also in trouble this week over comments that he made during his 2008 election bid that he was opposed to same-sex marriage for religious reasons. *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that a new book from Obama’s adviser, David Axelrod claims that Obama was actually in favor of same-sex marriage at the time.

Looking at the Republican Party this week, *Political Animal* [writes](#) on Saturday that the GOP’s refusal to expand Medicaid in many states is likely to come back to haunt them. They say that states with Republican legislatures, such as Wyoming and Tennessee, are missing out in millions in expansion money which would benefit their citizens.

The GOP has held control of Congress for a month as of this week – *FreakOutNation* [says](#) that their short tenure has already been ‘bleak’ and that President Obama has been able to move his agenda forward. They say that Congressional Republicans are ‘shaky and confused’ and are not fit to govern given their lack of progress in funding the Department of Homeland Security, and Obama’s veto threat over the Keystone XL pipeline. This week, *The Federalist* [delves](#) into the roots of the divide between the conservative and establishment wings of the Republican Party. They say that, in reality, the party is not all that conservative, shown by the fact that it presided over Medicaid expansion and pork-barrel spending in the mid-2000s.

Elections and the road to 2016

On Thursday, *Sabato’s Crystal Ball* looks ahead to [this year’s gubernatorial races](#) scheduled for October and November, in Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi. They say that while the states vote Republican at the presidential level, they do have histories of electing Democratic governors.

Likely 2016 presidential hopeful and Wisconsin Governor, Scott Walker, was in London this week on a mission to promote trade. *Political Heat* [writes](#) on Wednesday that when Walker was asked about his support for evolution at a public event, he dodged the question. They say that this shows that Walker has no respect for science. *American Thinker* is more [upbeat](#) about Scott Walker. For them, his personality as an ‘ordinary American’ and his plain speaking manner are assets.

On Monday, *National Review’s The Campaign Spot* [looks](#) at another Republican governor that may have presidential ambitions – Louisiana’s Bobby Jindal. They say that Jindal is setting up an early election cycle clash over the Common Core education program. Jindal has proposed education reforms which will change the way teachers are hired and rewarded, and expand parent choice.

The former Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, is considered by many to be a front-runner for the Republican nomination in 2016. *PoliticoUSA* [reports](#) on a campaign misstep – the hiring of Ethan Czahor as his chief technology officer, which was marred by the unearthing of some of his past online comments that were

misogynistic and homophobic.

On Tuesday, *Town Hall* examines the wider Republican field, saying that Florida Senator Marco Rubio and the former Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, are 'poised' to enter the race, and that they would be running as 'hawks' on national security. *The Atlantic*, meanwhile looks at what they say are 'the longest long shots' of 2016, including former Governors George Pataki (New York), Jim Gilmore (Virginia) and Bob Ehrlich (Maryland).

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda



Wisconsin Governor, [Scott Walker](#) Credit: Chatham House (Flickr, [CC-BY-2.0](#))

Attorney General, Eric Holder, is not usually well-liked by the majority of Republicans. So it came as a surprise that this week Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) praised Holder on his approach to drug enforcement policy, according to *PoliticusUSA*. They say that Paul agreed that Holder was correct in ending support for letting police seize the assets of suspected drug dealers when they had not been charged with a crime. *Hit & Run* is not so positive about Eric Holder's reform of forfeiture rules – they write this week that a new analysis has shown that the reforms would have accounted for less than one-tenth of forfeiture money received by the states from 2008 to 2013.

The Supreme Court was in the news this week for its refusal to impose a stay on a Federal District Court's declaration that Alabama's laws against same-sex marriage are unconstitutional. *Outside the Beltway* reckons that this is a further signal that the Court is likely to rule in favor this year of the four same-sex marriage cases it has accepted for appeal. The *Brennan Centre for Justice* also looks at the Supreme Court this week, writing Tuesday that a case over whether or not the names of campaign donors should be kept confidential may help lead to an expansion of anonymous 'dark money'.

At the end of the month, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) runs out of money, and Congress has been scrambling to put together a bill to fund it past that point. While the White House wants a 'clean' funding bill, Congressional Republicans have added amendments which would reverse President Obama's previous executive orders on immigration. *The Daily Signal* says that Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell has conceded that the Senate is gridlocked with Democrats who continue to filibuster a motion to debate the legislation, despite the measure passing in the House in January. *FreakOutNation* reports that House Republicans are now urging McConnell to gut the rule that allows filibusters so that the bill can proceed. They say that this is ironic given how much they 'loved' the same rule before they took the Senate last November.

Talking Points Memo reports on a spirited exchange between the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Bob McDonald, and Representative Mike Coffman (R-CO), who lambasted McDonald for his lack of progress on fixing the agency's problems. McDonald's response – "I've run a large company sir, what have you done?". McDonald is the former CEO of Procter and Gamble.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

House Speaker John Boehner recently invited the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu to address Congress, much to the chagrin of the Obama administration which has argued that it is a breach of protocol. *PoliticusUSA* says that the list of Congressional Democrats who are intending to boycott the speech is growing.

On Sunday, *Daily Kos* writes in agreement with the Cuban President, Raúl Castro, over his recent comments that

the U.S. military base in Guantanamo should be given back. They say that it was taken ‘at gunpoint’, and that it is a key stumbling block to the normalization of relations between the two countries.

What is the role of the military on U.S. soil? *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at homeland security and the armed forces, and suggests that their use should not necessarily be a last resort, but that it can also provide preemptive support in planning a response to major disasters.

On Tuesday, *Red State* [accuses](#) President Obama of ‘burning down’ another U.S. alliance. This time it’s with Thailand, after the Obama administration sent an ‘apparatchik’ to criticize Thai officials for their role in that country’s recent coup. They say that the U.S. needs allies such as Thailand in the region in order to counter China’s growing influence.

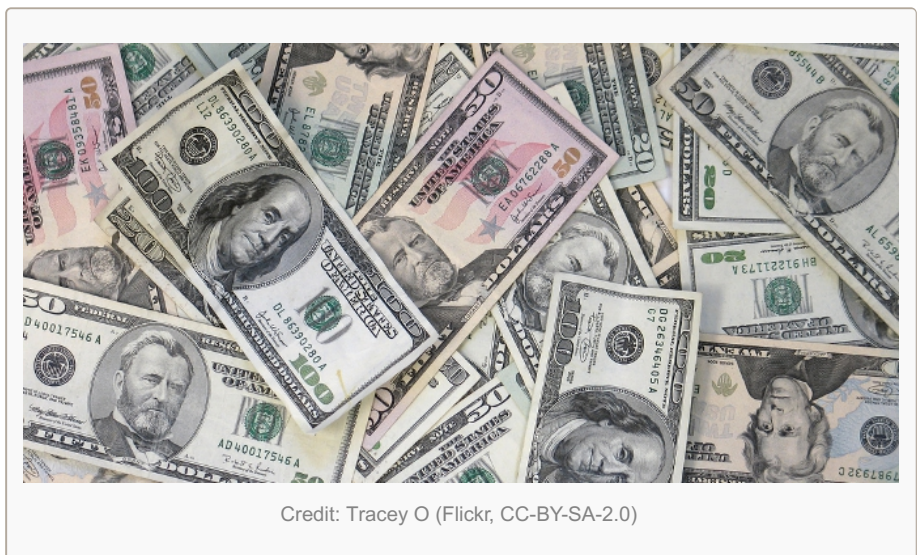
This week also saw President Obama move to seek an authorization for the use of military force in the ongoing war against the forces of ISIS. *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) Obama is looking for the go-ahead for a war that he has already started, and that because of its wording, it might constrain his successor from committing ground troops until after 2018.

Obamacare and health policy

On Monday, *Ten Miles Square* [reports](#) that ten million people have now signed up for Obamacare, and that if the Supreme Court upholds the challenge to subsidies on the federal exchanges that serve the states, they will be breaking a large reform that works on the whole. *The Democratic Truth* muses further on that Supreme Court challenge, known as *King v. Burwell*. They [wonder](#) what the effect on the Republican Party will be if the subsidies are thrown out, which will leave many people without health insurance. *The American Interest* meanwhile [argues](#) that moves towards controlling costs in healthcare have helped to create the current crisis that has seen hospitals consolidate.

The economy and society

On Sunday, *The Atlantic* [argues](#) that stock buybacks by large companies are ‘killing’ the American economy. They say that corporate profits’ take of the U.S. economy has doubled over the past 40 years, but most of this extra money has gone into buying back company stock – \$6.9 trillion since 2004. They say that, in the past, this money would have flowed through the broader economy in the form of higher wages and increased investment in plants and equipment.



This week saw veteran NBC anchor Brian Williams suspended from his job after it came to light that he did not truthfully report a story about being under fire in a helicopter in Iraq. *Town Hall* [writes](#) that Williams’ ‘blunder’ is a another chapter in U.S. journalism’s ‘fall from grace’, with levels of trust in the media and its reporting at only 40 percent. *Wonkblog* meanwhile reports on another – much more trusted – journalist this week. They [say](#) that the host of *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart (who announced that he would be leaving the show this week), changed journalism before the profession was ready to change.

The American Interest [writes](#) this week on what they say is ‘America’s debt prison scandal’. They say that many jails across the country are now debtors prisons with people jailed for minor offenses even longer because of the debts incurred. The *Brennan Centre for Justice* stays on the topic of incarceration with a [new report out this week](#) that shows that since 2000, the increase in incarceration has had no effect on levels of crime.

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