

## Obama vs. Senate Democrats, Jeb Bush in trouble over Iraq, and America's lottery shame: US national blog round up for 9 – 15 May

*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

This week saw President Obama push Congress to grant him the Trade Promotion Authority that would give him the ability to complete free trade negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership between the U.S. and eleven countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Obama had public disagreements this week with some in his own party over the trade deal. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) Monday that the President had 'harsh words' for Massachusetts Senator, Elizabeth Warren, rejecting her claims that the deal would undermine financial regulation and also accused her of playing politics.



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

*PoliticusUSA* [comments](#) this week that President Obama has failed to learn from his, and the Department of Education's mistakes, in the area of charter schools. They say that both Republicans and the Obama administration love to 'pander' to the charter school industry, with the latter recently asking Congress to increase funding for charter schools, despite the fact that the program is an 'abject failure' in their view.

Moving to the party more generally, the *Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at recent research which has found that black people in the U.S. have 'excess mortality' – that is that they tend to die sooner because of health inequalities compared to whites. They say that this trend among blacks may have cost the Democratic Party seven Senate elections and 11 gubernatorial elections between 1970 and 2004 through lost votes. Staying on the Democrats, *The Federalist* [writes](#) Wednesday that the party has become Elizabeth Warren's (mentioned above), as evidenced by her anti-trade influence in the Senate which caused President Obama headaches this week.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *Hit & Run* discusses the party's inconsistency over its limited government principles in the context of a bill in Congress which would impose a 20-week term limit on abortions. They [say](#) that despite the fact that the Constitution does not empower Congress to regulate state medical procedures; Republicans are still likely to press on and violate their principles when they conflict with their political agenda. *The Atlantic* [meanwhile](#) looks at the GOP's 'amnesia' over the Iraq war, after presidential hopeful and former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush's statement that he would have supported the war knowing what we know today. They comment that the conservative wing of the party is 'furious' with Bush's comments because they know that in order to win the presidency, they must nominate a candidate who can keep their distance from Iraq.

### Elections and the road to 2016

On Sunday, *Daily Kos* [comments](#) on laws which keep citizens of U.S. colonies from voting. They say that across places like Guam, American Samoa, and Washington D.C, more than 4 million U.S. citizens cannot vote, due to these people not enjoying full citizenship rights because of a century-old law.

Looking towards the 2016 Congressional elections, *National Journal* [says](#) that the Democratic Party needs former Wisconsin Senator, Russ Feingold to win back his seat from Republican Senator Ron Johnson. If Feingold, who announced his candidacy this week, wins then it will be that much easier for the Democrats to re-take the Senate.

Turning to general commentary on the 2016 presidential election, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) on Sunday that the election is likely to be close, but noncompetitive, with only seven states in real contention. They argue that the polarization currently showing in the Electoral College means that it is not only undemocratic, but also unhealthy. *National Journal* meanwhile, [reports](#) that despite the election being many months away, the GOP and their allies are already buying up the most valuable online ad space.

Highlights from the Democratic side of the 2016 race this week include:

- There's no 'blue wall' of 18 states which guarantee the Democrats the White House says *FiveThirtyEight*.
- Recently declared candidate, Senator Bernie Sanders (VT), has seen a [ten point spike](#) in Iowa polling (*PoliticusUSA*)...
- ...and despite his ultra-liberal credentials, he [opposes strict gun control](#) (*Wonkblog*).
- *Red State* [wonders](#) if we have reached peak Hillary (Clinton)...
- ... while *Townhall* has [15 reasons](#) why we should want her in the White House...
- ...and *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that while Clinton has been criticized for not taking any questions from the press in the past three weeks, she actually doesn't have to (because she doesn't really need the media in the way other candidates do).

Heading over to the Republican field:

- *Townhall* [reckons](#) that we better get used to how big it is given the number of smart candidates...
- ...and *National Journal* [comments](#) that the field is quite flat, with few candidates really standing out.
- Ben Carson has [defended](#) his recent statement that President Obama is a 'psychopath' (*Crooks & Liars*)  
...
- ...while *Townhall* thinks he would make the [perfect](#) candidate for Vice-President.
- Senator Lindsay Graham (SC) is running for president for [some reason](#) (*Outside the Beltway*) despite having virtually no chance of winning the nomination.
- We shouldn't [underestimate](#) Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal (*Roll Call's Rothenblog*)...
- ...though we also [shouldn't](#) take the campaign of former Arkansas Governor, Mike Huckabee seriously (*Hit & Run*).
- Texas Senator Ted Cruz was asked to speak [Spanish](#) by Bloomberg reporter Mark Halperin, and refused (*White House Dossier*)...



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

- ...while fellow Hispanic candidate, Senator Marco Rubio (FL), [outlined](#) his 'Liam Neeson' foreign policy at a South Carolina summit this week, summarized as: 'We will look for you, we will find you, and we will kill you'.
- There is [no 'good' answer](#) for Jeb Bush on whether or not the Iraq war was justified (*National Journal*)...
- ...though he [walked back](#) his pro-war comments after stating he misunderstood the original question (*White House Dossier*)...
- ...but was later [confronted](#) by a college student at a talk this week about ISIS (*Crooks and Liars*).
- Bush is also staffing his presidential campaign [through](#) a 'dark money' non-profit called 'Right to Rise Policy Solutions' (*Daily Kos*).

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

On Tuesday, *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at why government forecasts make Social Security look more secure than it actually is. They argue that Social Security forecasters have consistently overstated the well-being of the program, and their prediction that its funds will run out in 2033 does not make realistic assumptions about birth rates and life expectancy, meaning that funds may run out sooner. *Hit & Run*, meanwhile [reports](#) that the Veterans Administration (VA), has been wasting \$6 billion a year in violation of federal contracting rules, all while asking for more and more money.

Moving on to the House of Representatives, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) Thursday that House Republicans were able to pass the bill (mentioned above) which would ban abortions after the 20<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy, a law which may well be unconstitutional. On Thursday, *The Atlantic* [reports](#) that the House passed a bill this week that would end the National Security Agency's bulk-data collection program, following a Circuit Court of Appeals decision last week that the collection program had not been authorized by the Patriot Act. *Crooks & Liars* [bemoans](#) Congress' 'bad timing' after a House draft appropriation bill this week proposed to cut \$300 million of Amtrak's funding, just after a horrific train crash which killed eight people.

On Tuesday, President Obama lost an important Senate vote to debate fast-track trade legislation, 53 – 34, with many Democrats against the measure, [reports](#) *Daily Kos*. Obama's defeat was relatively short-lived, [says](#) *The Atlantic*, with lawmakers making a deal Wednesday which would see votes to crack down on currency manipulation and give preferential treatment to imports from African countries, on top of the bill to give Obama trade promotion authority. Staying in the Senate, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the Senate Banking Committee is looking to increase Congressional oversight over the Federal Reserve, with proposals to give the Fed's regional presidents more power, and require the head of the New York Fed to be nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

### **Foreign policy, defense and trade**

*Informed Comment* [wonders](#) why neither the U.S. nor Israel is willing to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, while at the same time pushing for sanctions against Iran over that country's nuclear program.

On Monday, *The American Prospect* [says](#) that we should 're-litigate' the 2003 Iraq war in the 2016 campaign, in light of Jeb Bush's recent comments on the topic. They say that candidates like Hillary Clinton will need to explain how the Iraq War will inform her thinking about the foreign policy challenges which face the next president. *Talking Points Memo* comments that Jeb Bush has triggered an '[Iraq War watershed](#)', with GOP hawks now stating that it was a mistake –something which shows that the debate over the war is really now over.

Meanwhile, the *White House Dossier* [reports](#) that the Obama administration has pushed back hard against the notion that the cancellation of Saudi King Salman's meeting with President Obama is a 'snub'. They say that the message, even if the White House is denying it, is that Saudi Arabia is unhappy with the current deal being struck with Iran.

This week also saw a story published in the *London Review of Books* which claims that the Obama administration lied about the details of the raid against Osama bin Laden four years ago. *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that the article is

a distraction from the problematic terrorism policies of Pakistan, which has also received nearly \$30 billion in U.S. economic and military aid over the past 13 years.

### Obamacare and health policy

On Sunday – Mothers' Day – *The American Prospect* [argues](#) that if the U.S. really cared about mothers, then reproductive healthcare would be available to all. They say that maternal death rates are higher in the U.S. than in 40 other countries, and that abortion is not easily accessible in many states. Later in the week, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the Obama administration has released new guidelines that stipulate that insurers must provide a full range of birth control options at no cost to consumers.

On Monday, *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) introduced new regulations that have actually made health care more expensive, and that the law's subsidies were intended to mask the effects. They argue that removing the ACA's three mostly costly insurance requirements, the age rating restrictions, benefit mandates, and minimum actuarial value requirements, could reduce premiums for less expensive plans by up to 44 percent.

### The economy and society

On Saturday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at where the U.S. currently ranks on the minimum wage – 27<sup>th</sup> out of 29 countries. They say that it would move up to 11<sup>th</sup> place, if there a \$12 minimum wage was instituted by 2020. Low wages are undoubtedly a major influence on poverty in America, though Representative Darrell Issa (R-CA), the wealthiest member of Congress, seems to think that the country's poor are the 'envy of the world', from his recent comments. *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that Issa made the comments during an interview with the *CNNMoney* program. For many, playing the



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lottery may be one way that people believe they can get out of poverty. *The Atlantic* comments this week on 'America's [\\$70 billion shame](#)', writing that in the 43 states where lotteries are legal, Americans spent more on them than the entire country did on sports tickets, books, movie tickets, and recorded music sales.

Last week President Obama made a plea for the Trans-Pacific-Partnership whilst visiting a Nike factory in Oregon. *Wonkblog* [says](#) that while Nike has stated that the trade deal may help the company to create 10,000 engineering jobs in the U.S. these will only be replacements for the workers it has been losing in recent years.

On Tuesday, *Americablog* [looks](#) at a new report on religious affiliation which has found that all major Christian denominations have seen declines in their population share, with the overall falling from 78.4 percent to 70.6 percent between 2007 and 2014. They say that this fall should come as no surprise, as 'Christian' is increasingly being associated with 'socially conservative'. *Townhall* meanwhile, [argues](#) in favor of free speech in the wake of the shooting last week at a contest to draw Mohammed in Dallas, Texas organised by anti-jihadist blogger, Pamela Geller.

### And finally...

*Sabato's Crystal Ball* has a [quiz](#) which asks you to match the presidential candidate with their home town, from

Abilene to Yorba Linda.

*Wonkblog* has a helpful [map](#) which shows where in the U.S. it's cheaper to buy than rent.

More seriously, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [examines](#) whether or not the U.S. is a Republic or a Democracy.

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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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