

## Landmark SCOTUS rulings, Obama's trade win, and controversy over the Confederate flag continues: US national blog round up for 20 – 26 June

*SApp 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 courted controversy this week with his use of a racial epithet during an appearance on the popular 'WTF' podcast, used in reference to the fact that racism still exists in the U.S. *Talking Points Memo* [writes](#) Monday that the key thing that conservatives do not understand about Obama's use of the term is that he is not the first president to use it, but he is the first one not to use it as a slur.

On Tuesday, *The Atlantic* [reports](#) that President Obama will get his trade deal after all, after the Senate voted to advance a bill giving him 'fast-track' authority to negotiate agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Trade Promotion Authority had previously stalled after the Senate had approved a measure which also included assistance for displaced workers, which was then voted down by the House. The current measure will only land on the President's desk because of help from Congressional Republicans in getting it through.

Obama's good week turned even better Thursday when the Supreme Court ruled in the *King v. Burwell* to uphold the Affordable Care Act's subsidies for federal health insurance exchanges. *Roll Call's PotusOperandi* [says](#) that the ruling, in combination with the passage of Trade Promotion Authority, and the potential for a deal with Iran over that country's nuclear program will be a moment that everyone in the Obama administration will want to savor. Friday sees the Court [rule in favor of marriage equality](#) – could Obama's week get any better?

Moving on to the Democratic Party more generally, *American Thinker* [ponders](#) this week why it is so disciplined. They say that the Democrats are a party of interests, while the GOP is one of ideas, with the former being kept together by leaders, such as Hillary Clinton, who cater to its various interest groups.

This week was a rough one for the Republican Party even before the Supreme Court began making its historic announcements. Last week's shooting in Charleston, South Carolina has led to a growing debate over the role of the Confederate flag in many southern states, especially amongst the GOP. *The Fix* [comments](#) on the party's rapid political shift on the flag, which began with the announcement by South Carolina's Republican Governor, Nikki Haley, that she would support the removal of the flag from the grounds of the state capitol. On Wednesday, *The Monkey Cage* [says](#) that the GOP has bid goodbye to the flag, and is embracing a new strategy that is more inclusive and takes into account the country's changing demographics.

### Elections and the road to 2016

Looking to run for the Senate next year? It helps to have a parent who is also a Senator. *The Fix* [writes](#) this week that a recent study found that the children of Senators were 8,500 times more likely to become one as well.

Turning to the presidential election, *Smart Politics* has an [electoral scorecard](#) for the 16 candidates that had announced as of Monday. They have 107 winning and 22 losing campaigns between them. Former New York Governor George Pataki is the most impressive of the group, with ten losses to no defeats.

One thing that we do know about the 2016 election is that Obamacare will be very important to the campaign. Ahead of the Supreme Court's decision, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that that the GOP's presidential candidates will need to lay out real alternatives to Obamacare, and that Democrats such as Hillary Clinton will likely propose further fixes

to the program. Post the Supreme Court's Obamacare ruling, *RedState* [writes](#) that the Affordable Care Act is now back on the table in that Republican candidates can use the current moment to argue for its replacement with their own proposals.

Staying on the GOP, *Post Politics* has the [news](#) that some of its potential presidential candidates such as Senators Ted Cruz (TX) and Rand Paul (KY) have 'scrambled' to return donations given to their campaigns by an alleged white supremacist leader who had been cited by alleged Charleston gunman, Dylan Roof.



Florida Senator Marco Rubio Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Moving on to what's been going on with the Republican Party's candidates this week:

- Billionaire Donald Trump announced his candidacy last week. It turns out that many of those who attended his launch were paid actors ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- Florida Senator Marco Rubio has downplayed his emerging competition with former Governor Jeb Bush ([Post Politics](#)).
- Senator Rand Paul's (KY) 'fair and flat tax' is actually neither ([America blog](#))...
- ... while *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that Paul is following a new strategy to avoid gaffes – saying nothing.
- *Roll Call's Rothenblog* [asks](#) if Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker has what it takes to win in 2016...
- ... though he may not if he continues to shoot himself in the foot over guns ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal announced his 2016 candidacy this week. *FiveThirtyEight* [reckons](#) he's four years too late...
- ...and *Political Animal* [says](#) that he's doomed.
- New Jersey Governor Chris Christie is likely to announce his candidacy next week, despite 'cratering' approval ratings in his home state ([Outside the Beltway](#)).

A Democratic win in 2016 would represent a third term for the party, something that it has not accomplished since World War II. *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [calls](#) the perception that the party cannot attain a third term a 'mythical obstacle', writing that it is the campaign that matters. Taking a closer look at the Democratic presidential contenders:

- Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is 'rocking' politics with his truth-telling ([PoliticusUSA](#))...
- ...and he also had a massive turnout at a rally in Denver this week ([Informed Comment](#))...
- ...though we should be wary of what many are terming 'Bernie's boomlet' ([The Fix](#)).
- Former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley has attacked Sanders for not being liberal enough on gun control ([Hit & Run](#)).

- Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is still very much the frontrunner, and remains 'untouchable' in the polls ([Outside the Beltway](#))...
- ... and perhaps does not need the support of the progressive Netroots Nation gathering which she skipped this week ([Post Politics](#)).
- *Townhall* [warns](#) us that the First Amendment could be on the way out if Clinton wins in 2016.

## Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

What a week for the United States Supreme Court. Thursday and Friday saw SCOTUS announce landmark rulings for both the [Affordable Care Act](#) (Obamacare) and [marriage equality](#). On Thursday, the Court ruled that Obamacare's subsidies for federal health insurance exchanges was part of the intent of the original law. *The Volokh Conspiracy* [writes](#) that Chief Justice has rewritten the Affordable Care Act in order to save it once again, by resolving the ambiguity around the intent of the Act in favor of the government.

*National Journal* comments on the role of Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy in Friday's ruling on *Obergefell v. Hodges* that has made same-sex marriage legal across the U.S. They [say](#) that Kennedy has written all the Court's most important decisions validating gay rights and has a short history of his involvement in past rulings that have led to this one. *The Daily Signal* now [wonders](#) if Kennedy is still the main swing vote on the Supreme Court – previously his ideology had placed him in the middle of the Court's two wings, but Chief Justice John Roberts may be attempting to take his deciding role. Speaking of Roberts, *The Fix* [comments](#) on his 'full-throated' dissent on the gay marriage decision – Roberts wrote that the decision completely undermines America's democratic process and that the Constitution had nothing to do with the decision.

The Supreme Court also found time this week to rule on a challenge to Texas' attempt to scale back the federal Fair Housing Act. *The Atlantic* [warns](#) that while the ruling may seem to be liberal on the surface, five justices signed on to an opinion which narrows the Act in important ways.

Moving on to the government, *Federal Eye* [writes](#) Tuesday that one year after the Veterans Affairs scandal, the number of veterans still on waiting lists is 50 percent higher than at the same time last year. The Department of Veterans Affairs is also facing a \$2.6 billion budget shortfall, which may lead to a hiring freeze or furloughs. The government's Office of Personnel Management suffered a large scale hack (likely from China) earlier this month – *The Daily Signal* [argues](#) that in light of the hack Americans are likely to become even more reluctant to entrust their data in the government's electronic records.

On Thursday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the House has passed a trade bill package 286 votes to 138 that includes trade adjustment assistance (TAA), which would provide financial and job training help to workers displaced by trade agreements. This comes after TAA was separated from associated Trade Promotion Authority legislation after it failed to pass in the House last week.

## Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Sunday, *Outside the Beltway* [calls](#) for an end to the Cuba travel ban, arguing that it is 'insane' that U.S. citizens are technically allowed to travel to Iran and North Korea, but are restricted from going to Cuba. They say it is up to



Congress to act to end the travel ban, though there does not seem to be much likelihood that will occur anytime soon.

*The Daily Signal* [bemoans](#) the fact that the national security budget has decreased by 15 percent (following 2011's sequester) when the world has not become any safer. They say that Congress needs to iron out the country's national security budget for the next fiscal year and invest responsibly in protecting U.S. interests. Most conservatives are not fans of President Obama or his foreign policy and most Americans feel the same way, writes *The Fix* this week. They [say](#) that despite this lack of support at home, a new study has shown that in 39 countries, 69 percent of people had a favorable view of the U.S., and 65 percent have confidence that the president is doing the right thing in world affairs.

On Thursday, *The Hill's Congress blog* [worries](#) that U.S. 'dithering' in Iraq will turn the country into a failed state. They write that the absence of a U.S. strategy in Iraq as well as a lack of a capable Iraqi army mean that Iran-backed militias have become the leading services in the fight against ISIS, which in turn will help Tehran to advance its agenda in the region.

### Obamacare and health policy



On Tuesday (ahead of the Supreme Court's *King v. Burwell* decision), *Perspectives* [reports](#) that the Congressional Budget Office has again told Republican leaders that any repeal of Obamacare would increase the national debt by billions. If it isn't repealed after 2016, Obamacare will have the effect of reducing the deficit through more than \$1 trillion in new revenues and savings from cuts in payments to insurance companies and hospitals. *PoliticusUSA*, meanwhile [says](#) that a new poll has shown that for the first time, more Americans approve than disapprove of the Affordable Care Act, with 47 percent in favor to 44 percent against. *Informed Comment* lists the [top 6 achievements of Obamacare](#) – chief among them that the number of uninsured Americans has fallen by nearly 17 million since the summer of 2013.

After the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of Obamacare's subsidies, *The Fix* [looks](#) at what happens now to the states which were in the process of setting up their own exchanges. They say that Arkansas, Delaware, Michigan and Pennsylvania were in stages of creating Obamacare exchanges, but it might be to some of those state's administration's political and economic advantage to stay on the federal exchange system.

Taking a conservative perspective, *The Daily Signal* [says](#) Thursday that despite the Supreme Court's decision, Obamacare remains unworkable, unaffordable, and unpopular. They write that millions of Americans face higher health costs because of the program, and that the Court's ruling in no way fixes Obamacare. *Wonkblog* [comments](#) that Republicans still have an opening to take on Obamacare, through the little-known Section 1332 of the Affordable Care Act, which could allow a GOP president the executive authority to waive some of its main components in conservative states that want to take a different approach to health policy.

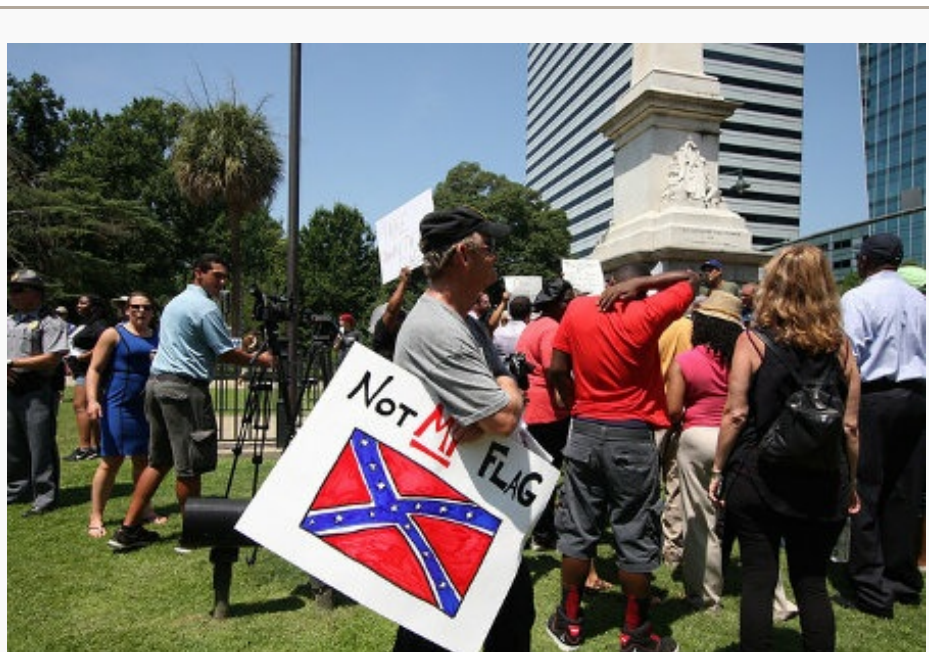
### The economy and society

On Monday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that states on the Atlantic coast are currently ‘racing’ to give the largest tax breaks to people for their yachts. New York recently offered to limit sales tax on new yachts to \$20,000, which would save buyers of a \$2 million boat \$150,000 in taxes. Florida is considering a similar measure that proponents say would benefit those who build ships by helping to bring new customers onto the market.

*The Atlantic* [looks](#) at the recent history of deadly extremism in America. They say that since 9/11, white supremacists and anti-government radicals have been responsible for nearly twice as many deaths as jihadists (48 compared to 26). They argue that since 2001, Americans have lost sight of what the daily reality of terrorism looks like given that a recent poll found that 78 percent are concerned in some respect about Islamic terrorism in the U.S.

On Friday, *Daily Kos* [comments](#) that while the spread of marriage equality across the states is a cause for celebration, the fight for LGBT equality is far from over. They remind us that in more than half the country, it is still legal to fire someone based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

The week’s main news before the Supreme Court’s landmark ruling was the controversy over the Confederate flag in the wake of the Charleston South Carolina shooting last week. *Townhall* [argues](#) that the controversy is a ‘complete misdirect’, and that while having a national conversation about the flag is important, the conversation has nothing to do with the shooting in South Carolina. Misdirect or not, the controversy spread to the business world this week, with Walmart, Kmart, and Sears removing the Confederate flag from its stores, [reports Outside the Beltway](#). On Thursday, *The Fix* [weighs](#) in on the controversy, commenting that it has stemmed from the desire of many – especially in the political class- to do something after a tragic shooting such as Charleston, but that the obvious option of increasing restrictions on guns is too hard and too controversial.



Take Down The Confederate Flag Rally at SC State House Credit: [Perry B McLeod](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0](#))

**And finally...**

*Wonkblog* has a [map](#) showing the biggest company in every state. In Texas it's ExxonMobil, and California, Chevron.

Who says that the Supreme Court is without a sense of humor? *National Journal* [writes](#) that the Supreme Court quoted Spiderman in a case about paying royalties to a similar toy.

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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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