

How Congress can improve the Iran deal, Cruz calls McConnell a liar, and how long can Trump go on?: US national blog round up for 18 – 24 July

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 Saturday this week, *American Thinker* looks at why so many people [regard President Obama positively](#). They say that despite the president's policy failures at home and abroad and scandals, Obama continues to have a reasonably high job performance rating. They write that one reason for this is that Americans are predisposed to give the president the benefit of the doubt. *Political Animal*, meanwhile, [reports](#) that Obama has gone 'all-in' with criminal justice reform after he commuted 46 prisoners who were serving long sentences for non-violent drug offenses, proposed ideas for criminal justice reform to the annual NAACP convention, and became the first president ever to visit a federal prison.

While many have praised President Obama for his accomplishments in areas such as health care and diplomacy, *The Lonely Conservative* [writes](#) that he has a much poorer record in the area of child poverty, stating that his tenure has seen 3 million more children living in poverty.

Moving on to the Democratic Party more generally, *National Journal* [writes](#) on Sunday on the liberals who 'aren't loving' Florida House Democrat, Alan Grayson. They say that many Democrats have refused to endorse Grayson in his bid for the Sunshine State's open Senate seat in 2016 because of the 'problematic aspects' of his candidacy which include his reported management of hedge funds and negative comments about his estranged wife. [According](#) to *The Fix* this week saw chaos break out at presidential forum at the annual Netroots Nation meeting, with Black Lives Matter protestors interrupting presidential candidate, Martin O'Malley, who was criticized for stating 'All Lives Matter'. They write the eventual Democratic candidate is likely to need people like the protestors in order to win next year, just as President Obama did.

Turning to the Republican Party, *America Blog* [reports](#) Friday on a new survey that shows that the party's brand has taken a huge hit since the beginning of the year, with only 32 percent of Americans viewing the party favorably compared to 41 percent at the end of 2014. They comment that Republicans themselves account for the biggest share of this decline in favorability. One aspect of the party that seems to be both a help and a hindrance is billionaire Donald Trump, who announced that he was running for the presidency a few weeks ago. *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that Trump, who has been in the news this week for controversial comments about Senator John McCain's war record, does not represent the future of the GOP – but he does show where the party is at right now given his polling lead.

Elections and the road to 2016

On Thursday, the *Mischiefs of Faction* gives [two approaches](#) to predicting which party will win next year's presidential election; one model based on national conditions and another based on the strength of the coalitions that support the parties. *VoteView* similarly brings an academic view to the 2016 contest, by trying to map [the ideological locations of the presidential contenders](#). They find that, unsurprisingly, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is the farthest to the left of the declared candidates, and Texas Senator, Ted Cruz, the most conservative.

The Republican side of the 2016 presidential race heated up this week after billionaire Donald Trump commented that Arizona GOP Senator John McCain was 'not a war hero' because he had been captured during the Vietnam War, [reports](#) *Crooks & Liars*. Trump's comments understandably caused a great deal of controversy and

discussion within the political blogosphere:

- *The Atlantic* [wonders](#) if Trump's campaign counts as 'News' or 'Entertainment' after the *Huffington Post* announced that it will put details of Trump's run in the latter section.
- Trump's fans are still on his side despite his comments about McCain ([Crooks & Liars](#))...
- ...even though he is the 'world's greatest troll' who is being deliberately provocative to gain media coverage ([Five Thirty Eight](#)).
- Trump is so trollish in fact, this week he gave out Senator Lindsey Graham's (R-SC) cellphone number in a public speech after the Senator called him a 'jackass' ([Hit & Run](#)).
- Trump's behavior has led him to surge to the top of the polls in the GOP field ([Crooks & Liars](#))...
- ... though *The Fix* [reminds](#) us that July polls are poor at predicting who the Republican nominee will be.
- Sensing that he may be starting to annoy his party, Trump also this week floated the idea that he may run as a third-party candidate next year ([Outside the Beltway](#))...
- ...and with more than \$250 million cash in hand and a significant income, Trump might be able to stay in the presidential race until at least next September ([The Fix](#)).



Donald Trump Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Moving on to other Republican candidates not named Donald Trump:

- Kentucky Senator Rand Paul's campaign appears to be fizzing, and he has fallen from the top tier of the polls ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- Wisconsin Governor, Scott Walker has had a hard time stating his position on issues this week – when asked by a CNN reporter if he thought that being gay 'was a choice', Walker [responded](#) by stating that he did not have an opinion (*America Blog*)...
- ... and was similarly unclear when asked about his position on the proper federal response to states' legalization of marijuana ([Hit & Run](#)).
- *Political Animal* wants '[the real](#)' [Jeb Bush](#) to stand up, given his recent nice behavior which belies his 'darker' personality from a decade ago...
- ... though Bush was anything but nice about Medicare at a New Hampshire rally, stating that Americans need to look for ways to phase out the program ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Ohio Governor John Kasich announced his presidential run this week – *FiveThirtyEight* [calls](#) him a 'Jeb Bush in John Huntsman clothing', referring to people's perception of him as a relatively moderate Republican despite the fact that he has a relatively conservative record...
- ...while *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that Kasich's White House bid is 'quixotic'.
- New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie, is now well off the polling radar after not getting a bump in the polls following he announced his candidacy last month ([Hit & Run](#)).

Turning to the Democratic Party and the 2016 election, *National Journal* takes a [close look](#) at the four states which will 'make or break' the party's hopes for retaking the Senate. They comment that the party has suffered setbacks in North Carolina, New Hampshire, Florida, and Pennsylvania, which may make taking the chamber back that much harder next year. On Sunday, *Political Animal* [reports](#) that Conservatives have launched pre-emptive attacks against the current Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Julian Castro, who many commentators have picked as Hillary Clinton's likely running mate next year. Moving on to the candidates themselves:

- A SuperPAC campaigning for former Maryland Governor, Martin O'Malley has raised just under \$289,000 in its first month – [Post Politics](#) says that this is a 'relative pittance'.
- While O'Malley struggled with which side to take on "black lives matter", former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton has played the issue well ([The American Interest](#)).
- If Clinton does become president, her 'top goal' of increasing wages for Americans could well be impossible due to reasons outside of her control ([The Fix](#)).
- [The Atlantic](#) asks if there should be a criminal investigation into Clinton's use of a personal email address while at the State Department after allegations that she may have used it to handle classified documents surfaced this week.
- Vermont Senator, Bernie Sanders, may have had help from an unexpected source to get into Congress – the National Rifle Association ([Crooks & Liars](#)).

Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro Credit: Gabe Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY)



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Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Sunday, [Red State](#) writes that things are 'still awful' at the Department of Veterans Affairs, with the Department having no idea as to how many veterans have died whilst waiting to receive care. They say that there has been very little reporting on the issue, despite the fact that the problem has not got better, and may be getting worse.

The deal between Iran and the United Nation's Permanent Security Council plus Germany is currently before Congress, which can make a motion to approve or disapprove of the agreement. [The Atlantic](#) looks at how Congress can improve the deal, writing that lawmakers should condition any vote to sustain a presidential veto (if the deal is voted down) on ramping up American resources to Israel and U.S. Sunni allies, as well as guarantees of tough additional sanctions against Iran should it misbehave outside of the nuclear realm.

This week presidential candidate, Jeb Bush, had a novel idea – dock the pay of Congressional lawmakers who miss votes. [The Fix](#) says that the measure, if implemented, could result in some Senators – such as Texas' Ted Cruz – losing up to \$40,000 per year.

Moving on to the House of Representatives, [FreakOutNation](#) writes Saturday that House Democrats have offered a deal to their Republican colleagues – they will drop their amendments to appropriations bills which would see the Confederate flag banned from National Parks in exchange for an update of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. This week also saw GOP House Speaker, John Boehner, under pressure from colleagues to use the appropriations process to end federal funding for Planned Parenthood. [The Daily Signal](#) says that Boehner wants to know more 'facts' about the program before ending funding.

The Senate was the scene of tough talk on Friday with Ted Cruz (R-TX) calling Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell (R-KY) a liar after the latter moved to set up amendment votes on a transportation bill in a way that made amendments beyond the repeal of the Affordable Care Act and a reauthorization of the Import-Export Bank, difficult. [Post Politics](#) comments that Cruz was incensed by this, as he had announced his intention to offer other amendments.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Sunday, *Townhall* [argues](#) that President Obama's deal with Iran earlier this month was an epic failure, which means that the country is now only 16 – 24 months away from having a bomb. They also write that the U.S. pledge to share technology with Iran on how best to protect their nuclear arsenal is either dense or sinister. Also responding to the Iran deal, *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that Obama has been striking deals with some of the world's 'most odious' regimes, including Cuba, which is also known for its human rights

violations. Despite such harsh commentary from the right on Obama's Cuba policy, *Post Politics* [suggests](#) that the Republican Party may be thawing on the issue, reporting that The Senate Appropriations Committee voted on Thursday to attach three amendments, including a repeal of a the travel ban that has been in place since 1963, to a federal spending bill.

The Hill's Congress Blog [writes](#) this week that while the Army's decision to cut on-base personnel on 30 installations is long overdue, what is really needed is for unnecessary bases to be closed altogether – by getting rid of just 5 percent of its facilities, the Pentagon could save \$2 billion per year.

This week many on the right mocked presidential candidate Martin O'Malley for his claims that climate change is linked with the rise of ISIS in the Middle East. *The Atlantic* [says](#) that despite the criticisms, such a link isn't crazy given that there is an established body of research that links droughts and resource scarcity to conflict.

Obamacare and health policy

On Monday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that what is said by many to be a revolution in the way that doctors are paid – isn't. They say that moves by some accountable care organizations to reward doctors who keep patients well with fewer tests and appointments has done very little in increasing doctors' pay who go down this route.

The economy and society

On Sunday, *Informed Comment* [asks](#) why we don't fear climate change in the way that we fear threats to national security. They say that climate change is a threat to international security and should be treated the same way as terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Crooks & Liars [covers](#) a little-mentioned aspect of America's gun deaths – that police shoot many Native Americans. They are the second most likely group to be killed by police after African Americans. In response to concerns about guns, many municipalities have instituted 'gun-free zones'. *United Liberty* writes that such a zone at a military base did not stop a recent tragic shooting in Chattanooga, Tennessee. They [argue](#) that we need to let members of the military defend themselves and expand concealed carry laws.

Red State [looks](#) at the cost of 'free' community college, in response to the plan unveiled by President Obama in January. They say that Obama's plan, which sets aside \$60 billion over the next decade to pay certain groups' tuition fees will do nothing to teach responsibility or time management, and is nothing more than 'feel-good politics'.



Ted Cruz Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Immigration is a perennially controversial topic – just look at how Donald Trump’s comments on Mexican immigrants have polarised the Republican Party. But many cities are actually fighting to attract immigrants, reports *The Atlantic*. They [say](#) that there is evidence that immigrants are creating businesses and revitalizing the workforce, and that they contribute more to the economy once they’ve learned English and become citizens.

This week the death of Sandra Bland whilst in police custody was in the news, after footage emerged of her being threatened with a Taser by a police officer during the traffic stop that led to her arrest. *Wonkblog* [says](#) that however Bland died, the number of suicides in the country’s jails is a national tragedy.

And finally...

The Fix has an excellent [supercut](#) of President Obama’s appearances on the *Daily Show* through the years.

Roll Call’s Heard on the Hill has the newest thing for the presidential campaign – a [Donald Trump insult generator](#).

Featured image: Ted Cruz Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-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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