

The Democrats' bad election week, boots on the ground in Syria and can Jeb! fix his campaign?: US national blog round up for 31 October – 6 November

USAPP Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson** looks at the best in political blogging from around the Beltway. Our roundup of state political blogging will follow over the weekend.

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President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Monday this week, *Red State* [writes](#) that President Obama is on course to double the national debt by the time he leaves office in 2017. They say that he inherited a federal debt of \$10 trillion in 2008, and that now the debt stands at \$18.1 trillion. This week the president announced that he would 'ban the box' on federal government job forms – the box that ex-offenders must fill out on job applications. *Wonkblog* [comments](#) that while the move is a victory for civil rights groups, it stops short of banning the box for federal contractors as well.

Turning to the Democratic Party more generally, *The Fix* [writes](#) Tuesday that a new Pew study has shown that the largest religious group among Democrats is 'none', i.e. those who do not identify with a religion. This week was not a great one electorally for the Democratic Party – the GOP candidate in the Kentucky gubernatorial election, Matt Bevin, won a surprise victory, and the party failed to retake the Virginia state Senate despite only needing one seat. *Hit & Run* [says](#) that the election defeats hint at the challenges facing the party – and the political system in general.

Turning to the Republican Party, *The Fix* [comments](#) that this week's elections proved that the GOP has an 'absolute stranglehold' on governorships (32) and state legislatures (30) across the country. On the national stage, former president George HW Bush's new book was published this week. [According](#) to *Crooks & Liars*, it's caused controversy on the right as it blasts his son George W's Vice-president Dick Cheney as an 'iron-ass', and his Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, as 'arrogant'.

Elections and the road to 2016

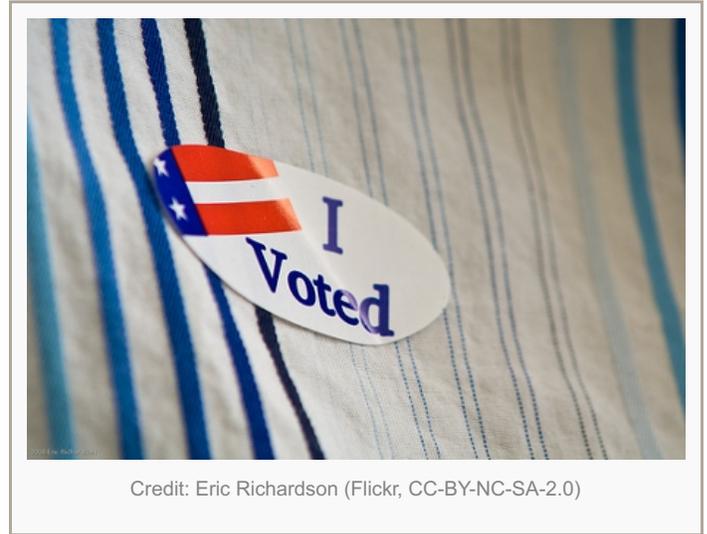
On Tuesday, given that it was Election Day, *The Fix* details eight races which were [worth watching](#). Aside from Kentucky's gubernatorial and Virginia's Senate race, they point out Ohio's marijuana referendum and Pennsylvania's Supreme Court election. *America blog* [similarly](#) takes a look at the ballot initiatives that we should be looking at this week.

With the 2016 election one year away as of this week, *FiveThirtyEight* [comments](#) that while neither party has an advantage, there is some suggestion that the GOP may have a small advantage in the generic ballot and the Democrats in the Electoral College.

The Democrats' 2016 campaign

Outside the Beltway [writes](#) Tuesday that while the race for the Democratic nomination is not yet over, former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton has it very nearly sewn up given her huge national polling advantage. Looking at Clinton and the other candidates closely:

- While things may look great for Clinton at the moment in terms of polling, this may not last given much of the public's perception of her as dishonest and untrustworthy ([The Fix](#)).
- Clinton announced this week that she supports an \$12 an hour minimum wage ([Post Politics](#))
- Clinton's last remaining major rival, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, has the best record of showing up for work while running for president ([PoliticusUSA](#)).
- After not wanting to discuss Clinton's 'damn emails', it now seems that Sanders does want to talk about them ([The Fix](#)).
- Sanders also said this week that the Democratic presidential race's tone has become 'too personal' ([Post Politics](#)).
- Constitutional scholar Lawrence Lessig pulled out of the race this week, citing the Democrats' unfair debating rules that barred him from appearing on stage with the other candidates ([Post Politics](#)).



The Republican Party's 2016 campaign

On Saturday this week, *Red State* [previews](#) the GOP's presidential primary calendar. They argue that the calendar is 'backloaded' to stop an insurgent campaign. *The Fix* [reports](#) Wednesday that GOP super PACs are outspending the candidates on TV ad buys by a factor of 20 to 1. They say that these ratios will smooth out as the GOP field narrows as the general election approaches.

Last Wednesday's GOP presidential primary debate was widely panned for the alleged bias of the CNBC moderators. *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that the various Republican presidential campaigns met this week in an effort to take control of the debate process. They comment that whatever changes they advocate, they are likely to be modest and unlikely to have any real impact on the debate process going forward. *The Federalist*, meanwhile, [argues](#) that even though the media's bias against the GOP is 'terrible', the Republican candidates' demands are just as bad, given they include prohibiting camera shots of the audience and longer opening and closing statements. *Political Animal*, meanwhile says that the GOP's 'debate debate' is [unraveling](#), with the interests of the various campaigns beginning to manifest themselves. Are these 'biased' debates actually hurting the candidates? [No](#), says *The Fix*.

Moving on now to the candidates themselves:

Donald Trump



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

- Trump has a new book out – here are seven things it contains that you may not hear at one of his rallies ([Post Politics](#)).
- Whether or not polls show if Donald Trump or Dr. Ben Carson is leading depends on whether or not a real person asks the question ([The Fix](#)).
- Trump's support has dropped nearly 23 percent in two weeks ([Red State](#))...
- ...meaning that his 107-day polling lead is now over ([The Fix](#)).
- Perhaps Trump's poll numbers have been overstated ([Political Animal](#))?
- Is Donald Trump the real RINO in the race ([Powerline](#))?

Ben Carson

- It's now time that we started taking Ben Carson seriously as a candidate ([Political Animal](#))...
- ...which was made more difficult for many this week when a 17-year old speech from Carson surfaced where he claimed that the pyramids were built to store grain ([The Atlantic](#)).
- [Red State](#) reckons that Carson's views on the pyramids are 'meaningless'...
- ...though [Ten Miles Square](#) says that they do matter, as it shows that he rejects available evidence for his own interpretation.
- How Ben Carson could beat Hillary Clinton in the general election ([American Thinker](#)).

Jeb Bush

- After a poor showing in last week's debate, and ongoing cost concerns, Bush's campaign began firing senior staff this week, including its Chief Operating Officer ([Red State](#))
- Despite Florida executing 21 prisoners while Jeb Bush was governor, he is still conflicted about the death penalty ([Post Politics](#)).
- Is it time for Jeb to go? [Powerline](#) thinks so.
- The media's Jeb 'deathwatch' bears only a partial relationship to reality ([The American Prospect](#)).
- Bush's poll numbers in Florida are just terrible ([The Fix](#))
- From Jeb!, to 'Jeb can fix it' – Bush's latest rebrand ([FreakoutNation](#)).

- How Jeb could fix his campaign in five steps ([The Fix](#)).

Marco Rubio

- Rubio is rising in the polls, jumping into third place post-debate ([The Fix](#)).
- The GOP establishment is inching towards the Florida Senator; he has gained more endorsements than any other since Labor Day ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- Congressional staffers are backing Rubio for the GOP nomination as well ([Roll Call's Beltway Insiders](#))
- Donald Trump has been attacking Rubio over his use of a GOP credit card while he was a Republican leader in the Florida House of Representatives – and the attacks are getting under his skin ([Daily Kos](#)).
- How much do Rubio's personal finances really matter? ([The Atlantic](#)).
- In response to the ongoing criticisms, Rubio plans to release his credit card records in the next few weeks ([Post Politics](#)).
- Is Rubio lying about his tax plan ([Daily Kos](#))?
- *The Federalist* has a [list](#) of the six most racist things the media have said about Marco Rubio.



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

The rest

- Texas Senator Ted Cruz has changed the presidential landscape ([Townhall](#)).
- Ohio Governor, John Kasich, does not care much for 'influential conservative blogs' ([Red State](#))
- Former Hewlett Packard executive Carly Fiorina suggested this week that conservative women face a double standard as they are attacked with sexist remarks, while Hillary Clinton is not ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Despite her popularity, Fiorina has no real clear lane to the GOP nomination ([Roll Call's Rothenblog](#))
- A speech by New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie on drug addiction went viral this week ([The Federalist](#))...
- ...which led [The Fix](#) to say that Christie is having the unlikeliest of moments in the 2016 race.
- Could Christie thrive among the primary chaos? ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

Federal Eye [writes](#) that according to a new Government Accountability Office report, the Social Security Disability Insurance program overpaid \$11 billion to beneficiaries who earned too much money to qualify for full benefits. They say that, staggering as the number seems, it is only 1 percent of total expenditures.

This week President Obama signed a two-year budget deal, narrowly avoiding a government debt default. *The Fix* [warns](#) that despite the deal, a shutdown could still happen in December if Congress does not agree an omnibus spending bill.

This week was Representative Paul D. Ryan's (R-WI) first as House Speaker. *Political Animal* [says](#) that he has begun his Speakership with a dodge and a lie, by stating that he is willing to work with Democrats to achieve immigration reform, but not until President Obama leaves office. Staying in the House, *The Hill's Congress blog* has the [news](#) that

in a rare example of bipartisanship, the House recently voted to lift the ban on exporting crude oil. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the House also managed this week to pass a highway funding bill with a minimum of 'horrible' amendments. The bill guarantees six years of funding, though it only pays for three.

Moving on the Senate, *The Atlantic* [wonders](#) if 'Washington's most interesting egghead', Ben Sasse of Nebraska, can save the body. Sasse waited a year to give his maiden speech, and hopes to get the attention of his fellow Senators.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Saturday, *Informed Comment* [reflects](#) on President Obama's announcement late last week that the US will keep less than fifty special operations troops in Syria to train Kurdish fighters against ISIS forces. They say that keeping US 'boots on the ground' risks conflict with Turkey, not Russia, who is fighting elsewhere. Meanwhile, *The White House Dossier* looks at the 15 other times that President Obama promised not to put 'boots on the ground' in Syria.

American Thinker [says](#) that the move is a corrupt and amoral abuse by Obama of his powers as commander-in-chief.

Hit & Run [writes](#) incredulously of \$43 million spent by US reconstruction forces on a gas station in Afghanistan.

Outside the Beltway [comments](#) Tuesday that President Obama is likely to leave the world in as bad or worse shape as he found it in 2009.

Obamacare and health policy

On Saturday, *Townhall* [says](#) that confusion over the requirements of the Internal Revenue Service could cause more than 500,000 people to lose their health insurance subsidies. *The Fix* this week [looks](#) at what they say is the Republican Party's new 'potent' anti-Obamacare argument – that health insurance premiums are on the way up in 2016.

Daily Kos [writes](#) Tuesday on the GOP's 'hilariously wrong' predictions about Obamacare, from statements that it will fail, that it will destroy the country, to predictions that it would bankrupt states. *Ten Miles Square* meanwhile [looks](#) at how much of a difference Medicaid expansion makes to the number who remain uninsured in various states. They also comment that 90 percent of the adults who are in the Medicaid gap are in states that were formerly segregated.

The economy and society



House Speaker, Paul D. Ryan Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)



Credit: nathan esguerra (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [argues](#) that for the 7.5 million Americans who still owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth, the housing crisis is far from over, and that 15 percent of homeowners are still underwater.

Liberty Street Economics has some [options](#) for addressing the fiscal problems faced by Puerto Rico, such as providing an orderly framework for a bankruptcy regime for the Commonwealth.

Many of America's poor are actually relatively high-earners, [reports](#) *The Atlantic* this week. They profile the growing number of people and households who have reasonably good earnings, but are asset poor and are often in debt.

This week saw the legalisation of marijuana voted down in Ohio in a ballot referendum. *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at what this means for the future of the pot debate in Ohio and across the country.

Middle-aged white Americans are increasingly sicker and dying earlier. *The Atlantic* [says](#) that it may well be down to suicide, alcohol, and alcohol related diseases.

In 2014, more than 3,400 Americans renounced their citizenship – *The Fix* [examines](#) why the number has been on the rise.

Jeb Bush Featured [image](#) 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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