

Looking ahead – what we already know will happen in US politics and policy in 2018



With 2017 now in the rear-view mirror, it's now time to look ahead to the coming year in US politics and policy. USAPP Managing Editor, [Chris Gilson](#) gives a glimpse of what is either planned for, or needs to happen, in 2018 in Congress and beyond.

January – Congress returns and Trump's first State of the Union

The US Congress will be back in session this week, with the House's first full day of legislative work on Thursday the 4th. Congress has a good [deal of work ahead of it](#) in the coming days, with its December 22nd continuing spending resolution expiring on January 19th. Other legislative fights – which may well be caught up in the budget deal – include immigration, health care, and funding supporting areas hit by disasters last year such as Puerto Rico. If lawmakers can't agree by the 19th, then we may see yet another government shutdown.

On the 20th of January, groups across the US will hold rallies as part of the Women's March 2.0, a follow up of last year's Women's March. But in a country which appears to be fatigued by ongoing controversies, will these marches be able to [fuel a larger movement with electoral power](#)?

While President Trump approved sanctions against Russia last August, they have still not yet gone into force. So why not? Trump's administration [still needs to provide a list of firms which have done business with Russian entities](#) which are subject to sanctions, and thus should also be sanctioned. The deadline for this is January 29th.

A government shutdown would be bad news for President Trump, who will be giving his first State of the Union as President on [January 30th](#), and will undoubtedly wish to tout what he perceives to be the legislative achievements of his first year in office. Given Trump's relative unpopularity, research tells us that, whatever he says, he may even be [ignored by Congress](#).



Credit: [Office of the Speaker](#) [Public domain], via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

February – Mr Trump comes to London?

In the first week of February, Chair of the Federal Reserve, Janet Yellen will step down from her post, after President Donald Trump decided not to renew her tenure last year. While Yellen will be replaced by [Jerome Powell](#), the fact that he is a Republican does not mean that Congress will necessarily have [any greater control over the Fed](#) than it has before – in general Congress is very limited in its ability to hold monetary policymakers to account.

The US Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in a number of cases [from February 20th](#). Among them is *Janus v. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees* which challenges the fees paid by government employees to unions even if they are not a member. Recent years have seen the rise of ‘right-to-work’ laws across the states which ban the collection of fees from non-unionized workers; [such bans tend to reduce union power](#) rather than promote jobs and growth as many conservatives claim.

Rumor has it that The Donald himself may be making a [short visit to the United Kingdom](#) around the 27th of February to officially open the new US Embassy in London. Expect protests – especially in light of the [recent controversy](#) over his retweeting of the far-right Britain First organization.

March – Pennsylvania’s special election and what about the debt ceiling?

While the vast bulk of US elections this year fall in November, voters in Pennsylvania’s 18th Congressional district will go to the polls on March 13th to replace GOP Representative Tim Murphy who resigned in 2017 following reports that he asked a woman with whom he was having an affair to have an abortion. While Democrats have [done well](#) in recent elections, in 2016 Donald Trump [won the district](#) by nearly 20 points, with 58.1 percent of the vote. The race [may be competitive](#), but an upset seems relatively unlikely at this point unless Democrats can [paint the GOP candidate](#), Rick Saccone, as some kind of Roy Moore-lite.

By [late March or early April](#) the US Treasury is likely to have reached the end of what it can do using ‘extraordinary measures’ to avoid the US federal debt from breaching its ceiling. The debt ceiling was suspended last September until early December, but the government is now bumping up against its borrowing limit. Republican legislators will likely want to try and do a deal which kicks the debt can far past the November midterms so that they can avoid another potential Democratic attack line.

April – Democrats may face a tough race in Arizona

Democrats will have another chance at a US House seat on April 24th, when a special election for Arizona’s 8th Congressional district to replace Republican Trent Franks will take place. Franks [resigned](#) in late 2017 following allegations of sexual harassment. There’s a relatively [large field of candidates](#) ahead of the February 27th primary, but it’s worth remembering that Trump won the district in 2016 with the same percentage as he did in Pennsylvania’s 18th District, mentioned above – [58.1 percent](#). Democrats clearly have a lot against them in the 8th: in both 2014 and 2016, Democrats failed to even run a candidate against Franks. The current district contains much of Maricopa County, which is now well known for its controversial former Sheriff, Joe Arpaio. Recently pardoned by President Trump following a contempt of court conviction, Arpaio has shown [no interest](#) in running for the seat: instead his eyes are on the US Senate.



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May – Trump associates' trials begin

In 2017 former Trump campaign officials, Paul Manafort and Rick Gates were indicted as part of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into potential collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign. The beginning of their trial has been [set for May 7th](#). While Manafort and Gates were indicted for offenses unrelated to the campaign, we should expect more commentary and scrutiny over the allegations alongside the trial.

June – Whither Trump's travel ban?

The early summer will likely see the Supreme Court hand down decisions on important cases. One such case could well concern [President Trump's travel ban](#) targeted at majority-Muslim countries. While the ban would have to first go on the Court's docket, the Trump administration is likely to file an appeal in January of an earlier decision from the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals which ruled the policy to be illegal.

Voters in the Golden State will go to the polls in June to select candidates for California's November elections for Governor, US Senate, and a number of other important statewide offices. Current Lieutenant Governor, Gavin Newsom, and Los Angeles Mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa (both Democrats) lead the polls in the Governor's race. The state's 'Jungle Primary' system means that the top two from any party advance; in a state dominated by the Democratic Party this often means that the GOP does not get a look in for many races come the general election. You can check out the latest polling for some of these races [here](#).



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September – Farm Bill on the agenda

The end of September will see the end of the US fiscal year, and thus [the expiration of 2014's Farm Bill](#). Congress will therefore be under pressure to reauthorize the bill – which also encompasses the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The provision of food assistance within the Farm Bill may [complicate](#) its reauthorization given recent cuts to the program; if the economy strengthens in 2018 then President Trump could argue that the need for SNAP [is no longer so great](#).

November – Here come the midterms

Barring a presidential resignation or impeachment, the 6th of November is the biggest event on the US political calendar between now and the 2020 election. All 435 US House members and 33 US Senators will be up for reelection.

In the House, the Republicans will be defending a majority of about 45 (depending on the results of this year's special elections). Normally this would be a steep cliff for the Democratic Party to climb, but Trump's very poor approval ratings and recent Democratic victories mean that [some reckon](#) that they may just be able to pull it off. If they were to do this, it would be nearly unprecedented in recent decades; in the 2006 wave, the party won back the chamber with a 31-seat swing.

The Democratic Party faces an even tougher map in the Senate – the party is defending 24 seats out of 33, four of which are rated as 'toss-ups' by the [Cook Political Report](#). Only three of the GOP's eight seats are similarly rated. The Senate currently contains 51 Republicans and 47 Democrats, with two Independents caucusing with the Democrats. For the Democrats to win back the Senate, they would have to hang on to all of their seats ([including ten](#) in states which Donald Trump won in 2016) and win two of the Republicans'. As we have in the past, we'll be previewing the toss-up races ahead of the elections with primers from academics based in the states themselves.



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And let's not forget 2018's state and gubernatorial races – we'll see 36 races for governor's mansions and races in 87 state legislative chambers. As with Congressional races, we'll be previewing the closest and most important of these elections right here on USAPP.

What are you looking forward to in 2018? Let us know in the comments below!

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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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About the author



Chris Gilson – LSE US Centre

Chris Gilson is Managing Editor of [USAPP – American Politics and Policy](#), the blog of the LSE's United States Centre. He also launched and managed the LSE's British Politics and Policy blog (2010), and EUROPP – European Politics and Policy (2012), and supports the creation and management of other blogs around the LSE. He has a undergraduate and a Masters degree in Geography, and a postgraduate diploma in Strategic Management, all from the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. With his coauthors, Chris has won a Times Higher Education Award for Knowledge Exchange. His interests include blogging, research communication, US politics, urban politics, and community activism. He tweets [@chrishgilson](#).