

The Stimulus five years on, Homeland Security cancels license plate tracking, and is Ted Cruz the new sheriff in DC town? – US national blog round up for 15 – 21 February

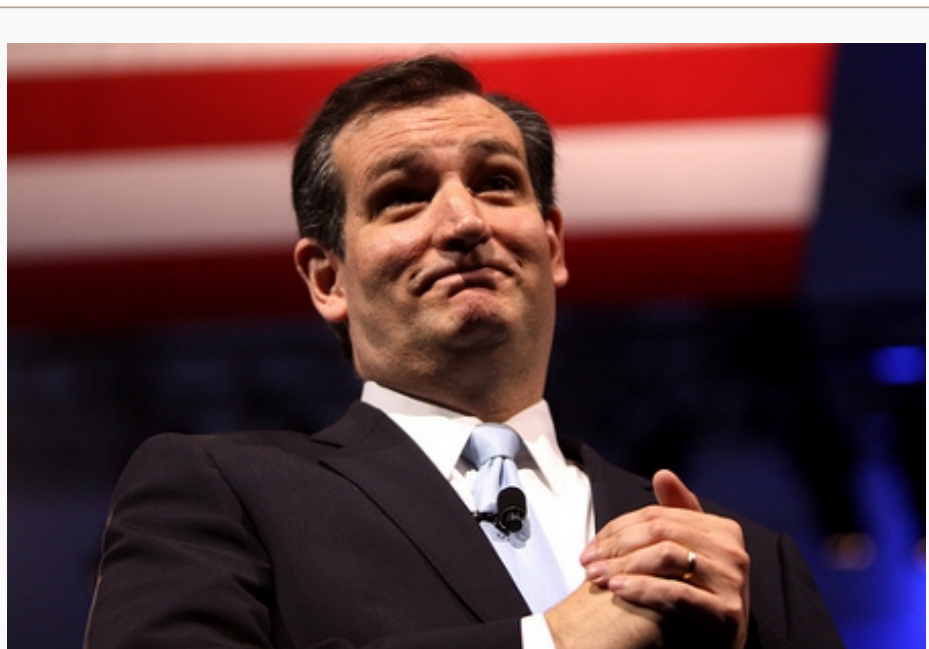
USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson, looks at the best in political blogging from the Beltway. Our round-up of state blogs will follow on Saturday afternoon.

The Democratic Party, the GOP and elections

With little chance of retaking the House of Representatives in this fall's mid-term elections, Democrats are now focusing on maintaining their hold on the Senate, which they control with 55 members (including caucused Independents). On Saturday, *American Thinker* [writes](#) that in Michigan, the Republican candidate, Terri Land, now has a small lead over Democratic Representative Gary Peters, meaning that the Democrats will have to fight even harder for a seat that has been reliably blue in the past. One piece of news this week that should have Democrats somewhat happier is *Lonely Conservative's* [report](#) that the biggest donors in American politics give to the Democrats. On Tuesday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that GOP House Speaker, John Boehner helped to prevent a 'civil war' within the Democratic Party as far back as in 2011, by not taking a White House deal which would have put entitlement programs under threat in exchange for new tax revenues.

Meanwhile, looking ahead to the 2016 Presidential election, *Daily Kos* wonders if Hillary Clinton, for many the near-certain Democratic candidate, is [the president the U.S. needs](#) at this time, given her relationships with big business and her pro-Wall Street stance. Later in the week, they report comments from GOP Representative (and 2012 presidential candidate) Michelle Bachmann, that people in the U.S. are [not ready](#) for a female presidential candidate in 2016.

This week saw considerable discussion about the role of Texas Senator, Republican Ted Cruz, in his party. On Saturday, *The Political Carnival* [writes](#) that Cruz is the 'new sheriff in D.C. town', especially after his battle with Speaker Boehner last week over immigration reform. Meanwhile, *PoliticusUSA* says that Cruz is so ['hated'](#) by other Republicans in the wake of the recent debt-ceiling vote, that he may need a food-taster. *United Liberty* takes the opposite line on Monday, [writing](#) that Cruz has followed through on his promises to rattle cages in Washington by putting the words that he campaigned on into action.



Ted Cruz Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

Last year, many predicted that the Republican Party was on the verge of a civil war between its Tea Party and establishment wings over candidates for the Senate. *National Journal* [writes](#) that this conflict has been characterised by a 'few scattered skirmishes' rather than all-out war. Instead, it appears that both sides have been targeting Democratic candidates in Senate races. On Wednesday, *American Thinker* [wonders](#) whether or not the

GOP might end up only one electoral vote away from the Presidency in 2016. Perhaps with this in mind, this week Senator Rand Paul [said](#) in an interview that Republicans will not win again in his lifetime unless the party undergoes a transformation, into a 'new' party.

On Monday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that Republicans have been forced to make changes to a series of webpages that to the casual observer appear to be fundraising for Democratic candidates, by using similar color schemes and pictures of candidates. These sites were in fact collecting money towards the Republicans for this year's Congressional races.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

Saturday sees *PoliticusUSA* [report](#) that President Obama has challenged Congress to follow his lead (he recently made an executive order to establish the minimum wage for federal contractors as \$10.10), and raise the national minimum wage as well. This call may well fall on deaf ears, as they report later in the week that Republicans have announced that they will not be passing any notable legislation this year, saying that it may well lead to 2014 being another 'lost year' in American politics. Meanwhile, *Daily Kos* reports that after repeatedly blocking an extension to the emergency unemployment aid that ran out late last year, a number of Republican Senators are now talking about their desire to extend it. They [say](#) that it is ridiculous that we are in this position at all, and that the emergency unemployment aid should have never been allowed to expire at all. *The Foundry* [writes](#) on Tuesday that given the degree to which Americans' are fed up with Congress, the body should 'lie low' for the time being, at least until the GOP re-takes the Senate and the Presidency.

American Thinker [says](#) that the 9th Circuit Court has recently upheld the Second Amendment by overturning a San Diego County concealed carry law, which would only grant permits in special cases. Meanwhile, *The Volokh Conspiracy* charts progress in firearm carry rights in the U.S. since 1986. They [say](#) that all states now offer at least the possibility of issuing a permit to carry.

On Wednesday, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) that the Department for Homeland Security has cancelled its plans to create a national licence plate tracking system, after concern from privacy advocates. Meanwhile, *Crooks & Liars* [says](#) that Homeland Security has been accessing existing license plate databases held by private companies for some time already.

According to *The Foundry* the leader of the largest teachers' union in America, the National Education Association, has said that the implementation of the Obama administration's 'Common Core' standards, was 'completely botched'.



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In honor of Presidents' Day on Monday, *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that America is in need of more 'statesmen' like William Henry Harrison, who they say had the good sense to expire without actually doing anything.

Affordable Care

This week saw the announcement that enrollment numbers into the Obama administration's signature healthcare reform policy, the Affordable Care Act (or 'Obamacare'), in January, had exceeded previous projections. *The*

Foundry [says](#) that these numbers are no reason to celebrate, as total enrolments are still below last year's projections of 7 million enrollees by the end of March, and because most enrollees are older Americans, guaranteeing that premiums will be higher. Meanwhile, *American Thinker* continues the Obamacare critique, by giving an [at-a-glance guide](#) of the program's delays, changes and repeals. *RedState* [writes](#) on Friday that a restaurant in Los Angeles has imposed a 3 percent 'Obamacare' surcharge, to pass along what they say are the higher for providing insurance under the program.

On a more positive note concerning Obamacare, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the program is benefitting millions of middle-age and older Americans. With many of them hit hard by the Great Recession, they say that the new law is a lifeline to these people.

Foreign policy and defense

On Sunday, *American Thinker* [reports](#) that Obama's promise that the interim deal struck with Iran over its nuclear program late last year that would maintain an oil export ban in exchange for sanctions relief, is no longer true, given that the country's oil exports soared in January. *The American Prospect* [reports](#) this week that the country's long-standing war in Afghanistan is now opposed by a majority of Americans.

On Monday, *National Journal* [covers](#) comments from Secretary of State, John Kerry, currently on a diplomatic tour of Asia, that climate change is a threat to U.S. national security, and has urged international collaboration to rein in carbon emissions.

The Hill's Congress Blog takes a [close look](#) at public opinion on the U.S.'s relationship with Cuba, writing that recent polling in Florida and the country at large shows that a majority are in favor of normalizing relations with the country. Staying the American neighborhood, *National Journal* writes on Thursday that the U.S. should take more opportunities to have [productive discussions](#) with Mexico on issues like trade and immigration reform.

The economy and society

On Saturday, *Informed Comment* [writes](#) that Americans are becoming increasingly negative towards Muslims. They suggest that these views are not necessarily related to a 'fear' of Muslims, rather they are part of a growing intolerance towards all minority groups in America. Still on the topic of intolerance, *PoliticusUSA* takes a look at the response from leaders from the Religious Right to Virginia's marriage equality ruling last week. The leaders have [called](#) Judge Wright Allen, who made the ruling, an 'activist' and 'arrogant'.

A major development in workers' rights came from Tennessee this week, where the American union movement suffered a large setback, [according](#) to *The Feed*. They say that workers at Volkswagen's Chattanooga, Tennessee, plant have voted 712 to 626 this week against unionizing with the United Auto Workers (UAW). This vote is unusual in that Volkswagen supported the union drive. On the issue, *The Foundry* [writes](#) that the factory's workers have voted not to turn Chattanooga into 'Detroit', as joining the union would have put their jobs at risk. Meanwhile, *Crooks & Liars* writes that 'fear' beat the UAW in Tennessee, with 'deep-pocketed union-busters' having mounted a coordinated campaign against organized labor.

On Tuesday, *Hit & Run* [looks](#) at a new report from the Congressional Budget Office that has found that raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 could cost the economy between 500,000 and 1 million jobs. *The Atlantic*, with the same report in mind, writes that despite the potential for job losses, raising the minimum wage would pull 900,000 people out of poverty, but also that it would only be a 'start' in the ongoing fight to combat inequality and poverty.

PoliticusUSA [reports](#) on Tuesday that 3,000 Americans have turned in their passports this year, mainly because U.S. tax laws have become too complicated – especially since Congress passed an act in 2010 which was aimed at tackling tax evasion.

This week also marked the fifth anniversary of President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, known more generally as 'the Stimulus'. The near \$800 billion program aimed to fight the onset of the Great Recession and create growth and jobs. On Monday, *Perspectives* [writes](#) that analysis from the Congressional Budget Office has proven that the Stimulus was a success, with unemployment being lower at the end of 2010

than it would have been without it. *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that Florida GOP Senator Marco Rubio is still 'whining' about the Stimulus after five years, despite the evidence of its successes.

And finally...

Roll Call's Heard on the Hill reports this week that staff assistants in the government have warned their colleagues – [no House of Cards spoilers](#).

Hit & Run says that a Girl Scout in San Francisco has hit upon a 'genius' idea: [selling cookies outside of a medical marijuana dispensary](#).



Finally, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) on Saturday, that 25 percent of Americans think that the sun goes around the Earth, and laments the state of the country's science education.

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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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