

GOP's midterm Senate advantage, ISIS operation costs reach \$1 billion, and has Boehner's Obama suit derailed?: US national blog round up for 25 – 31 October

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

With the midterm elections approaching rapidly, *National Journal* [writes](#) on Wednesday that the Obama White House is in denial that he is likely to cost the Democratic Party control of the Senate. They say that while White House officials have stated that Democratic candidates should have supported Obama more, the party's biggest mistake is not running away from Obama fast enough given his currently poor approval ratings. But why is Obama so unpopular? [According](#) to *Wonkblog*, it's not because of the various scandals and crises that have hit his administration, such as the botched launch of Obamacare, or the GOP's investigations into the Internal Revenue Service's alleged targeting of Tea Party groups. They say that Obama's low approval ratings are fairly typical for a President after a successful reelection campaign.

On Thursday, *RedState* [looks](#) at Obama's crisis management, saying that it leaves much to be desired. They write that Obama views every crisis, such as Ebola and the rise of ISIS, as a political opportunity, and make the real world considerations of what is going on, secondary. *Crooks & Liars* [takes](#) the opposite view, at least on Ebola, this week, saying that Obama's invitation of Ebola survivor, nurse Nina Pham, into the White House for a hug, has 'destroyed' Republican fear mongering of the issue.

On Monday, *Roll Call's At the Races* [looks](#) at who the new Chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee might be after the midterm elections. They say that Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid (AZ) is likely to have a larger pool of applicants than in 2012 and 2014, given 2016's much more favorable Senate map for the Democrats. They say that a variety of Senators are in the frame for the job, with Montana's Jon Tester said to be especially interested. Whatever happens in this year's midterm elections, Democrats should draw the lesson that they should be Democrats, writes *Crooks & Liars* this week. They [say](#) that the Party should not try and run away from the things that they stand for, by supporting Republican or more centrist ideas, as they will be criticized by the right no matter what. On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at the growing disenchantment of millennials towards the Democrats. They say that while this group closely backed Barack Obama in 2008, they have since shifted away from the Democrats and towards the GOP.

Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton caused a stir over the weekend with her comments to a Massachusetts rally of: "Don't let anybody tell you that it's corporations and businesses that create jobs", [reports](#) *Hit & Run*.

Moving over to the Republican Party, on Monday, *Caffeinated Politics* [wonders](#) whether or not House Republicans will be able to make the changes they need ahead of the 2016 presidential election. They say that for the party to govern, they need to deal with the Tea Party wing in the next Congress.

This week also saw a great deal of commentary on the wide field of 2016 presidential candidates from the Republican Party. On Sunday, *National Journal* [looks](#) at two Republicans who are considering 2016 bids, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, and former Governor of Arkansas, Mike Huckabee. They say that both have recently 'auditioned' to be the evangelical Christian movement's presidential candidate. Meanwhile, *National Review's The Campaign Spot* looks at New Mexico Governor, Susana Martinez, who is polling well in her state. They [predict](#) that by 2016, talk of putting her on the 2016 ticket will be 'deafening'.

Speculation about the likely candidacy of former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush (brother of George W.) continued this

week. *Political Animal* [reports](#) that Bush has ‘won’ his family primary, with endorsements from his father, brothers, son, and wife. Many on the right have dismissed the idea of a Jeb Bush candidacy, due to his relatively centrist positions on immigration reform and Common Core. *The Federalist* provides a ‘[tepid](#)’ defense of his potential candidacy, writing that he would be a formidable candidate (if he can make it through the primaries) because of his competence and his record on school choice issues.

Former Alaska Governor, and 2008 Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin was in the news again this week, [writes](#) *Outside the Beltway*. They report that Palin is ‘pretending’ that she may run for office again after indicating in an interview that she was open to the possibility.

Someone who is unlikely to be pretending that he will run for the Presidency in 2016 is Kentucky Senator, Rand Paul. *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) this week that Paul has recently states that the GOP’s brand ‘sucks’ for Black voters, and that the party needs to do more to change that perception.



Sarah Palin Credit: Gage Skidmore (CC-BY-SA-2.0)

The Midterm elections

While for political scientists and pundits, this year’s midterm elections have been of great interest, for the vast majority of Americans, they have been of little concern. On Monday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at why the elections seem so ‘boring’. They say that while there has been drama in some races, there is no real compelling theme or big issue overarching the elections, and there is little chance of any big changes in national policy, no matter what the result is. Think the midterms don’t matter? Think again, writes *Daily Kos* on Thursday. They [say](#) that it matters for 157,000 people without health insurance in Maine and Wisconsin, due to their Republican governors’ refusal to set up insurance exchanges. If those states elect Democrats next week, then there is a much greater likelihood that they will set up health insurance exchanges. *Crooks & Liars* [looks](#) at how the midterms are being reported, showing a news screenshot of two headlines from the Kansas gubernatorial race. One states that the Democratic candidate, Paul Davis, is losing ground, the other that he is widening his polling lead. They say that the differences are down to the partisanship of the media doing the reporting.

On Monday, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that with only a week to go, polls show that the Republican Party has a clear advantage in the race for the Senate, though some elections look tight. Meanwhile, *Roll Call’s At the Races* has a [roundup](#) of the ten moments that may have won or lost Senate control. These include Ashley Judd’s rumored bid against Mitch McConnell in Kentucky, former Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer’s pullout of that state’s Senate race in July 2013, and when the Democratic candidate, Chad Taylor, dropped out of Kansas’ Senate race in early September. On Tuesday, *The Daily Signal* looks at how a ‘crazy’ runoff in vote in Georgia could decide who controls the Senate in the next Congress. They [write](#) that tight polling suggests that neither the Democratic candidate, Michelle Nunn, nor her GOP counterpart, David Perdue, will gain 50 percent of the vote next week. This would mean that they would move on to a runoff in January, with Senate control potentially in doubt until then.

National Journal makes the [point](#) this week that control of the Senate is not the only thing that voters will be deciding this midterm cycle. They write that across the country, 146 propositions will go before voters on issues as varied as the legalization of marijuana, the minimum wage, abortion, guns, and tax policies. *Sabato’s Crystal Ball* [looks](#) at another aspect of the midterms – gubernatorial races. They say that of the 36 governor’s races taking place, 11 contests have margins of three points or less. *Daily Kos* takes time to [look](#) at the elections of the ‘second-most important state official’ in the midterms, state attorneys general. They say that while these elections tend to be overshadowed by gubernatorial and senatorial races, attorneys general have a great deal of power in terms of state law enforcement.

Government, the Beltway and Congress’ agenda

As mentioned above, while most commentators believe that the Republican Party has a good chance of retaking the Senate next week, there are some key races that might delay or even prevent that takeover. *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) on Monday that if Georgia and/or Louisiana go to runoff elections, this could lead to neither party controlling the Senate, which might then cause the government to shutdown in December, after the current government funding bill runs out. *The Atlantic* meanwhile [looks](#) at what the GOP Senate will be like if they win next week. They write that one possibility is that that Congress will become even more partisan and toxic than before, as if Mitch McConnell becomes Senate Majority Leader, he would likely devote the Senate to passing partisan legislation that Obama would never allow to become law. Another possibility is that McConnell may turn out to be a dealmaker, so as to avoid voter's blame for government gridlock.

While the Senate may still go either way, the Republican Party is almost certain to retain its hold on the House and make gains. One result of this, [writes](#) *Roll Call's Hawkings Here*, would be a diversity boost for the party in the House. *The American Prospect* also looks ahead to the shape of the House, [writing](#) on Wednesday that it could get 'even nuttier' after the midterms, with a newly minted batch of conservative Representatives who may pose a fresh challenge to Speaker John Boehner (OH).

Speaking of Speaker Boehner, this week, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at his lawsuit against President Obama (remember that?). They [say](#) that while it was authorized at the end of July, it has not been filed yet. The suit has apparently hit an additional snag, with the law firm preparing it ceasing work on it.

On Thursday, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that Congress still has little clue as to the degree that the National Security Agency spies on Americans. They say that the Senate Intelligence Committee consistently lacks basic information that they need for it to exercise adequate oversight.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Monday this week, *The American Interest* takes a [look](#) at the U.S. coalition with Arab states against ISIS. They say that the coalition is about more than that conflict, and closer ties may help to stimulate political and social change in Arab countries. Meanwhile, *Roll Call's Five by Five* [reports](#) that the cost of the U.S. operation has reached \$1 billion, or about \$7.5 million per day.

This week saw a crisis in relations between the U.S. and Israel, with the publication of comments from an Obama administration referring to Israeli Prime Minister as 'chickenshit' over his actions towards Palestine. *Talking Points Memo* [writes](#) that the rows should be seen in the context of the campaign of derision against Obama administration officials on from members of Netanyahu's government over the last three years, and the snub of Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon by key officials during a recent visit to Washington.

Obamacare and health policy

Concern over the spread of Ebola continued this week in America, with various states introducing quarantine programs for healthcare workers returning from Ebola affected areas in West Africa. *Informed Comment* [tries](#) to bring some perspective this week, by looking at five things more Americans will die of than Ebola this year. These include guns, obesity, smoking, coal smoke, and a lack of access to healthcare. Meanwhile, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at a little-known federal program which speeds up the regulatory review process for new drugs, and which might also speed up a cure for Ebola.



Two U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle aircraft fly over northern Iraq Sept. 23, 2014, after conducting airstrikes in Syria. (DoD photo by Senior Airman Matthew Bruch, U.S. Air Force/Released)

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [examines](#) the relationship between housing and healthcare. They say that while the expansion of Medicaid has given thousands of poor people access to healthcare, many of those people need housing as well, as their homelessness often exacerbates their already poor health. Looking at Obamacare more specifically, *Hit & Run* writes on Thursday that many Doctors are spurning patients covered by Obamacare's health exchange plans. They [say](#) that Doctors are worried about being on the hook if patients don't pay during the period after they enroll but have not paid premiums, and are concerned about the red tape involved. *RedState* [writes](#) this week that while Democrats have accused Republicans of cutting funding for Ebola research, it was in fact Vice President Dick Cheney who secured most of the money spent on Ebola research after advocating for the appropriation of billions to stop attacks from deadly pathogens in the aftermath of 9/11.

The economy and society

On Saturday, *Wonkblog* looks at U.S. space policy, [writing](#) that it still spends more on space (\$40 billion) than every other country does – combined.

While the U.S. economy continues to improve, many workers seem to have seen little benefit, causing calls for the minimum wage to be increased, with many such initiatives on midterm ballots next week. *The Federalist* [writes](#) this week that raising the minimum wage is the last thing that we should do, given that only 11 percent of workers who would benefit from an increase live in poor households, and that it would reduce the number of job opportunities for unemployed people.

Despite sluggish economic growth in recent years, the stock market has continued to improve. *Occasional Planet* [writes](#) that this is down to the Federal Reserve 'propping [it] up' via its policy of quantitative easing. The Fed's policy of quantitative easing is coming to an end as of this week, [reports](#) *Wonkblog*. They say that the \$3 trillion experiment in economic stimulation that has lasted for six years comes at a time of limited economic recovery and when millions of Americans are unemployed or holding down part time work, when they want to work full time.

On Tuesday, *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) that violent crime in the U.S. has seen a rapid fall since 2000 of over 23 percent. They say that this 'victory over crime' has reversed what seemed to be an unstoppable increase in lawlessness since the 1960s. While no consensus exists as to what caused the fall in crime, the spread of New York-style police and increased incarceration might go some way towards explaining it.

And finally...

Crooks & Liars [reports](#) this week that 75 year old Wisconsin man is considering filing a civil rights lawsuit after county officials sent an armoured military vehicle to collect fines from him.

Democrats are more fearful than Republicans this week, [according](#) to *Wonkblog*, who report that they are also nearly twice as likely to be afraid of clowns as Republicans are.

Hit & Run [writes](#) on the case of Detroit police who confiscated a couple's goats and chickens from their unofficial farm near the city's west side.

Featured image: House Speaker John Boehner Credit: Gage Skidmore (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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