

Biden meets Warren, the Pentagon's missing \$8.5 billion and why the Fed may not raise rates – yet: US national blog round up for 22 – 28 August

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 Sunday.

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President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

Monday saw one of the worst stock market crashes since the Great Recession, as Chinese stocks tumbled, followed by big falls in other stock indices across the world. *The Fix* [argues](#) that the big stock market drop is unlikely to hurt President Obama's approval ratings given that previous crashes did little to dent the approval of presidents in the past; such crashes are simply a small part of what's going on in the 'grand spectrum' of politics. Staying on the President, this week saw a good deal of speculation as to whether or not Obama would endorse his Vice-President, Joe Biden for the Democratic nomination in the 2016 presidential race. *Occasional Planet* [notes](#) that the Obama administration has been noticeably absent in commenting on the presidential run of former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and that endorsing Biden would make more sense, as he would likely carry Obama's policies forward in what would essentially be a third term for his administration.

The White House also came under fire this week after President Obama referred to Republicans as 'crazies'. *White House Dossier* [writes](#) Tuesday that White House Deputy Press Secretary, Eric Schultz, acknowledged that the statement was a mistake, but only in so far as the president was airing his frustration with challenges he faces this fall at avoiding another government shutdown.

Moving on to the Democratic Party more generally, *American Thinker* [looks](#) at how the 'New Left' has been able to take over the Party. They say that the Democratic Party now has its roots in the 'tenets of race and class identity, equal outcomes, and an expanding welfare state', rather than its former values of allowing people to pursue life, liberty, and happiness.

Turning to the Republican Party, *Talking Points Memo* [wonders](#) if billionaire Donald Trump is making a bid to rebrand the GOP as a white nationalist party given his recent immigrant-bashing. They say that Trump is appealing to the politics of resentment, populism, and grievance. There has been a great deal of speculation as to whether Trump's hard line on immigration will hurt the Republican Party. *Monkey Cage* [reckons](#) that it probably will not, given how many GOP voters think that illegal immigration is a serious problem, and because there is widespread support for his policies, such as business owners checking worker immigration status and cutting funding for sanctuary cities.

Elections and the road to 2016

Speaking of the current Republican frontrunner, Donald Trump had yet another eventful week:

- He's actually gaining support among non-whites, despite his comments on immigration (*The Fix*)...

- ...while his 'nativist campaign' is also rallying racist supporters ([Hit & Run](#))...
- ...which include a former KKK Grand Dragon, David Duke ([FreakOutNation](#)).
- In this light, it is unsurprising that Trump claimed this week to know nothing of the Black Lives Matter movement ([Daily Kos](#)).
- [RedState](#) [defends](#) Trump, claiming that he and most of his supporters aren't racist, and argues that people are only saying that he is as he is daring to oppose the GOP leadership's preference for immigration reform.

- While in the past, Trump has stated that his campaign will be self-financed, he is now apparently open to taking contributions – so long as donors do not expect political favors in return ([Post Politics](#)).
- In another somewhat surprising policy announcement, Trump also stated this week that he thinks the rich should pay more in taxes ([Wonkblog](#)).
- Looking ahead to the rest of the campaign, [Talking Points Memo](#) [games out](#) the Trump 'nightmare' scenarios, whereby he gains the nomination next year.



- The GOP are trying to persuade Trump to pledge to not run as a third party candidate if he fails to gain the nomination. They can make him take such a pledge, which would allow him to go on some state's primary ballots, but they can't make him honor it ([The Fix](#)).
- By Thursday, Trump was leading the GOP field with 28 percent ([Talking Points Memo](#))...
- ...but some are wondering if his support is overstated as many of his supporters in the polls appear to be unlikely voters ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- Is Trump the Ross Perot of the 2016 election? ([American Thinker](#)).
- Trump was also in the news this week for his ejection of Univision anchor Jorge Ramos, from an Iowa press conference Trump was giving ([RedState](#))...
- ... and he's also been whining that Fox News has not been treating him fairly ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- [The Fix](#) has rather helpfully [diagrammed](#) all of Trump's various feuds whilst he's been running for the presidency, from Fox News to the other 2016 candidates.

Moving on to the rest of the Republican presidential field, [The Hill's Congress blog](#) [writes](#) on Monday that serious GOP candidates should not embrace Donald Trump's 'fringe' birthright citizenship theory and outlines the difficulties that any would face if they wished to change or challenge the 14th Amendment which established birthright citizenship. [Townhall](#) also [looks](#) at the GOP and immigration, writing this week that the party should pursue a policy which would involve sealing the borders and the creation of a 'Purple Card' which would be a form of amnesty.

On Saturday, [Outside the Beltway](#) [warns us](#) not to expect the Republican presidential field to shrink to any great degree before the Iowa Caucuses in February – mostly because of Donald Trump's influence in the race. Previous presidential primary contests have been characterized by more infighting between moderate candidates which has

tended to begin to shrink the field at this point in the cycle.

Turning now to the GOP's still-large field:

- Neurosurgeon Ben Carson wants to use drone strikes on the caves used to transport Mexicans across the southern border ([FreakOutNation](#)).
- Wisconsin Governor, Scott Walker, has flip-flopped on immigration once again at the same time his polling number are crashing ([Outside the Beltway](#))...
- ...while *Post Politics* has [six ways](#) that Walker has become more like Donald Trump.
- *Political Heat* meanwhile [takes Walker to task](#) for his opposition to Planned Parenthood, and calls him a hypocrite given that the Governor's flagship jobs agency, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, gave substantial sums to a medical firm which did research on fetal tissue.
- Are the presidential ambitions of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie finished? ([Crooks & Liars](#))?
- An anti-Christie PAC certainly thinks so, winding up its activities this week, stating that Christie has 'performed the service of stopping his campaign in spirit' ([The Fix](#)).
- Last week we reported that former Texas Governor, Rick Perry's campaign was facing financial troubles – this week saw his Iowa chairman, Sam Clovis, resign because he was no longer being paid ([Post Politics](#)).
- This week did not seem to be a great one for former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush – *Political Animal* [says](#) that he has tried to attack Trump and the other GOP presidential contenders but has stumbled, referring to Asian immigrants as the main source of 'anchor babies'.
- Also on that point, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that Donald Trump has been able to make Jeb Bush seem like a 'wimp', given the former governor's lack of emotions on the campaign trail.
- *PoliticoUSA* [reckons](#) that Bush's campaign is 'collapsing' given his low poll ratings...
- ... while *The Fix* [wants to know](#) why he has embraced former Congressman Eric Cantor.
- *RedState* is unsure [what the point of \(Ohio Governor\) John Kasich](#)
- Former Hewlett Packard exec Carly Fiorina did well out of the GOP's debate earlier this month – is she better off being left out of the next one though ([The Atlantic](#))?
- With such weak polling there are new questions about how long South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham's presidential campaign continue ([Roll Call's At the Races](#)).



New Jersey Governor Chris Christie Credit; Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

The Democratic presidential primary field was also in the news this week – *The Fix* [writes](#) Thursday on the six big things that they know about it, including that the Democratic political class is spooked about how former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton has handled the problems with the private email server she ran. Looking at the candidates more closely:

- Clinton's polling isn't looking great with the percentage of Democrats who support her falling to around 45 percent after being 69 percent in April ([American Thinker](#)).
- *Daily Kos* says that despite what others say, Clinton's poll numbers [haven't dropped at all...](#)
- ...though that doesn't help the fact that when people think of Clinton they think of the word 'liar' ([The Lonely Conservative](#)).
- How is Clinton dealing with her email controversy? It's complicated ([The Fix](#)).
- Despite her problems, the 2016 primary map still favors Clinton ([Sabato's Crystal Ball](#)).
- While some are concerned about Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' rising popularity compared to Clinton, he may only win New Hampshire, and nowhere else ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- With growing concern about Hillary Clinton's polling numbers, speculation increased this week over the possibility that Vice-President Joe Biden might make a presidential run ([Outside the Beltway](#))...
- ...speculation that was further fueled by Biden's meeting with Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren ([Post Politics](#)).
- *Political Animal* [reckons](#) that Biden has little to lose in running for president...
- ...though the numbers and history are stacked against him ([The Fix](#)).
- *The Federalist* [wonders](#) if Biden will have to answer for his 'long record of terrible decisions' if runs for president.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Tuesday, *Federal Eye* [looks](#) at whether or not federal workers can be fired for adultery following the news that as many as 15,000 federal employees may have used their government email account to use the Ashley Madison site.

On Friday, *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that according to new public opinion polling, only 14 percent of Americans approve of the way that Congress is doing its job. They write that Congressional approval has been in the doldrums for the best part of a decade, largely because of the perception that it gets very little done anymore.

American Thinker [profiles](#) House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH), who they say may be the most underestimated man in Washington DC as he has claimed many conservative accomplishments for the GOP. Staying in the House, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) Tuesday that Republicans have promised a long and bruising war over defunding Planned Parenthood. They may either try to shut the government down in the fall over the issue or launch an in-depth investigation of the organization.

Moving to the Senate, *Post Politics* [reports](#) that Ted Cruz (R-TX) also stated this week that he would be fighting to defund Planned Parenthood, and that it would not be his fault if the government shut down over the issue. Still in the Senate, *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at the five key Democrats who could determine the fate of the Iran deal that is currently before Congress. The GOP needs 67 votes in the Senate to override a presidential veto of a resolution of disapproval for the deal.



Speaker of the House John Boehner Credit: Gage Skidmore (CC-BY- SA-2.0)

Foreign policy, defense and trade

Staying on the topic of the Iran deal, *The Daily Signal* [comments](#) on what they say is a 'secret side deal' to the agreement, whereby Iran will be allowed to use its own inspectors to oversee a site where it may be conducting nuclear weapons research. *The Hill's Congress blog*, meanwhile [says](#) this week that the biggest problem with the deal is that its text would exempt existing contracts from any re-imposition of sanctions, meaning that the so-called 'snap-back' provision has little teeth.

PoliticoUSA [writes](#) Saturday on what they describe as the GOP's 'favorite socialist program' – \$8.5 billion worth of Department of Defense contracts which it could not account for. They say that the DoD is the only part of government that is allowed to lose so much money without there being a national outcry.

Last week saw the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, David Shear release the DoD's new Asia strategy report. *The American Interest* [says](#) that the Pacific strategy is one of 'lock and load' with commitments to deploy more combat ships to the region.

The US has been using force against ISIS forces in Iraq and Syria for more than a year now, but can the Supreme Court force Congress to authorize this use of military force? *The Atlantic* [reckons](#) that it should if a member of the military comes forward with a legal challenge to the military action. *Outside the Beltway* meanwhile [warns](#) of the dangers of solely using airpower to fight wars such as the fight against ISIS.

Obamacare and health policy

On Thursday, *The American Interest* [reports](#) that big rate increases under the Affordable Care Act ('Obamacare') are about to go nation-wide, despite previous hopes that some state regulators would not approve the largest price rises. *Roll Call's Beltway Insiders* meanwhile [calls](#) for the Affordable Care Act to be freed from what they say are its unpopular taxes such as the medical device tax and a special tax on more expensive health insurance plans – the so-called 'Cadillac tax'.

The expansion of Medicaid across the states is a key provision of the Affordable Care Act. *The Federalist* [notes](#) this week that for many states, this expansion also means more cash for Planned Parenthood. They say that some states, like Oklahoma, are facing a coverage gap which may force them to accept the Medicaid expansion, which would mean more money for Planned Parenthood.

Worried about the high cost of prescription drugs? Blame President Obama and his colleagues [writes](#) *The Hill's Congress blog*, saying that they have fueled the rise with Obamacare.

The economy and society

Wonkblog [writes](#) this week that economic turmoil in China aside, the Federal Reserve may not raise interest rates in the near future because of the lack of inflation at the moment. Apparently the Fed needs to be confident that inflation is headed back up to 2 percent before it raises rates.

On Saturday, *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) that the majority of food stamp recipients are now working age adults, rather than children or seniors. They say that prior to the 2008 recession, 55 percent of food stamp receiving households consisted of children and the elderly.

This week saw a great deal of debate over 'anchor babies' – the children that many conservatives say undocumented immigrants have to allow them to stay in the US. *Americablog* [says](#) that they are not 'a thing', and that immigrants do not use them to gain citizenship; it's apparently a tedious and time consuming way of gaining citizenship.

The taxi service app Uber has come under criticism recently for its perceived failure to screen drivers, with many who had criminal convictions working for the company. *Hit & Run* [argues](#) that Uber should keep employing such drivers given how hard it is for former prisoners to find legitimate work once on the outside.

Wednesday saw the tragic shooting of two television journalists live on-air in Virginia by a disgruntled ex-colleague. *Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at why it is so difficult to pass gun control laws in the US – it's mostly because of the short 'issue attention cycle' whereby the media move on to other stories soon after shootings such as these,

meaning that the public becomes less concerned about gun control.

Most of the presidential primary season debates will be conducted on cable TV. *The Fix* wonders if this now equates to being a modern-day poll tax.

And finally...

Next week President Obama visits Alaska – *The Fix* looks at the history of presidential visits to the Last Frontier.

Hit & Run has an example of what presidential advertising looked like in 1940 – much longer.

With speculation growing about a presidential run by Joe Biden, *Smart Politics* looks at the history of vice-presidential presidential runs.

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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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