

Schumer gives Iran deal the thumbs down, the GOP's first debate and will Joe Biden run?: US national blog round up for 1 – 7 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 Saturday afternoon.

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President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Monday this week, *Informed Comment* draws [connections](#) between President Obama's politics and the rise of outspoken candidates Senator Bernie Sanders and billionaire Donald Trump. They argue that Obama's willingness to compromise, and his having lost sight of his mandate for change have led to voters being dissatisfied with the prospect of having yet another 'establishment' president.



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This week also saw the White House unveil its Clean Power Plan which sets state-level emissions targets. *The American Interest* [writes](#) that the President's policy is sure to be buffeted by legal and Congressional challenges as well as massive opposition from the coal industry and coal-producing states. *The Atlantic*, meanwhile, [examines](#) the politics of the new regulations, commenting that it has been designed to make it more legally defensible by offering states more flexibility in reaching their targets, as well as giving them more time to comply.

On Tuesday, *Hit & Run* [says](#) that a bill signed by President Obama five years ago – the Fair Sentencing Act – has done much to reduce the Federal prison population by making the penalties for crack cocaine offences similar to those for cocaine powder.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *The Atlantic* takes a [look](#) at the party's 30-year long fight to defund Planned Parenthood as it renews its calls to pull the organization's funding over the way it apparently handles fetal tissue. They say that the GOP's attacks are not really about fetal tissue but are a way of going after safe, legal, abortion. *Political Animal* [says](#) that calls from within the Republican Party to defund programs such as Planned Parenthood are being reinforced by its presidential fields' playing to the party's base, and attacks on the GOP's Congressional leadership for not standing up to Obama to the degree which they feel is needed.

Elections and the road to 2016

Turning to the 2016 presidential race, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at the state of the money race in the second quarter of this year. They say that former Florida Governor Jeb Bush leads the field with \$120 million raised between his campaign and SuperPAC, followed by former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who has raised just under \$68 million.

On Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [says](#) that at the moment, only one thing about the campaign is clear – many voters are angry. They say that this 'negative partisanship' has been on the rise for thirty years and that it is likely now the most important feature of the US political scene.

Turning to our regular round-up of all things Donald Trump:

- Trump continued to expand his polling lead this week, heading to over 25 percent ([Outside the Beltway](#))...
- ...while *Talking Points Memo* [says](#) that we should look at Trump's net favorables, which have him at +17 percent, a positive shift of 45 points in three months.
- *The Federalist* [looks](#) at who supports Trump – unsurprisingly, it is mostly older white males.
- Think Trump-mania is a big deal? You might be forgetting 2008's Palin-sanity ([The Fix](#)).
- *Red State* [reckons](#) that Trump is no longer a risk for the party, but an issue, given that needs to be dealt with before he steals the GOP's voter base out from under it.
- Is Trump in the first stage of his 'six stages of doom'? Only time will tell ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- *The Atlantic* [thinks](#) that one of Trump's 2010 donations might offer insights into what his priorities might be.



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

Turning to the rest of the Republican Party's presidential field:

- Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker still doesn't know if President Obama is a Christian or not ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Jeb Bush has been unapologetic about his SuperPAC's fundraising, stating that "you might as well front load it if you can" ([Post Politics](#)).
- Bush also questioned the need for the government to spend 'half a billion dollars' on women's health issues when asked about Planned Parenthood ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- If elected, former Arkansas Governor, Mike Huckabee would use federal forces to prevent women from getting an abortion ([America Blog](#)).
- New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie was booed this week at Monmouth Park by a crowd of over 60,000 ([FreakOutNation](#)).

- Are Donald Trump and Senator Ted Cruz birds of a feather? ([Townhall](#))

The GOP's first debate

This week saw the first debate between Republican candidates for the presidency in Cleveland, Ohio on Thursday evening. The week leading up to the debate was filled with commentary from across the ideological spectrum:

- *FiveThirtyEight* [says](#) that there is no perfect way to sort the candidates for such a debate after Fox News received criticism for using national polls to determine the top 10 out of 17 candidates.
- Fox's methodology ended up squeezing out the former Governor of Texas, Rick Perry, with present Ohio Governor John Kasich squeezing in ([Crooks & Liars](#))...
- ...as some claim that neurosurgeon, Ben Carson, does not deserve to be on the debate stage ([The Federalist](#)).
- *Townhall* [comments](#) on what the GOP's establishment candidates must accomplish during the debate...
- ...while *The Fix* [looks](#) at some expert prescriptions on how to debate Donald Trump.

We may want to take the debates this week with a grain of salt – *The Fix* has [seven charts](#) which show how much, and how little, they matter.

Before the main debate this week, fourteen GOP candidates took part in a forum in New Hampshire on Monday night. *Post Politics* [said](#) that the session felt like 'a round of political speed dating' and has details of how each candidate tried to stand out.

Thursday evening actually saw two debates; the first featuring the seven candidates who did not make Fox's polling cut for the later prime-time debate. *Hit & Run* [comments](#) that this debate saw little actual debating and said that, going by the opening round of questions, it was the "losers' debate". Most commentators agreed that the former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, Carly Fiorina was the winner of this first debate. *The Federalist* [acknowledges](#) this, but also argues that she is not probably electable given her record of mass-layoff while at HP. Turning then, to the main debate:

- Senator Rand Paul (KY) got the fight over surveillance programs that he had been spoiling for since 2014 when he sparred with New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie ([Post Politics](#)).
- Ohio Governor, John Kasich may have been one of the debate's biggest winners, having stolen Jeb Bush's thunder with his brand of compassionate conservatism ([National Journal](#)).
- *Informed Comment* has the [top cringe worthy foreign policy moments](#) from the debate – Senator Ted Cruz (TX) leads with praise for Egypt's leadership in addressing radical Islamic terrorists (President al-Sisi is accused of killing more than 1250 Muslim Brotherhood protestors)...



Ohio Governor John Kasich – Photo Credit: Governor Beshear (Creative Commons: BY-NC-ND 2.0)

- ...while *The Federalist* has the [ten worst Donald Trump moments](#) from the debate.
- Trump actually said during the debate that he had given most of his opponents campaign money – it turns out that's not true ([The Fix](#)).

- Trump also had the most speaking time at the debate, at more than ten and a half minutes – Rand Paul had the least, with less than half of that time ([Smart Politics](#)).

Moving on to the Democratic side of the 2016 race:

- A new poll shows that the party would crush the GOP next year if Donald Trump decides to run as a third party candidate, with Hillary Clinton beating Jeb Bush 44 percent to 29 percent ([PoliticusUSA](#)).
- Speaking of Clinton, *The Fix* [looks](#) at the two contradictory realities of her campaign – that while she has a major image problem, she will be very hard to beat in a Democratic primary.
- Clinton has apparently bought \$2 million in ad time in Iowa and New Hampshire, as polls show her support to be softening ([Post Politics](#)).
- While many have accused Clinton of being far too close to Wall Street, *Crooks & Liars* [says](#) that she collects far less money from that source than many think.
- The big news this week on the Democratic field is that Vice-President Joe Biden is thinking about running for President ([Outside the Beltway](#))...
- ...something that *The Fix* [says](#) does not make a great deal of sense given the lack of room for him in the race...
- ...while others describe Biden's campaign as being akin to Schrödinger's cat ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- Former Maryland Governor, Martin O'Malley has meanwhile [called](#) for a constitutional amendment which would guarantee the affirmative right to vote (*America Blog*).
- Senator Bernie Sanders has ruled out the possibility that he might run as a third party candidate if he does not win the Democratic nomination ([PoliticusUSA](#)).

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

With the House on its summer recess this week, Congress was a little quieter than normal, though the Senate was still very much in the news. *The Fix* [warns](#) that the GOP's attempts to defund Planned Parenthood could lead to another government shutdown in the fall if House and Senate Republicans attach a must-pass bill to the measure to fund the government, and the Democrats decide that the program is worth fighting for. *Roll Call's* [#WGBD](#) on the other hand [reports](#) that Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell (R-KY), has stated that there will not be any government shutdowns on his watch.

Roll Call's 218 [writes](#) Tuesday that House Foreign Affairs Chairman, Ed Royce (R-CA) and Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) have set the stage for the House to disapprove of the Iran nuclear deal when it returns in September.

Turning to the Senate, *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that Republicans on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works have alleged that a non-profit environmental advocacy group, the National Resources Defense Council has colluded with the Environmental Protection Agency to create the new emissions standards announced this week by President Obama.

On Thursday, *Outside the Beltway* reports that Mitch McConnell has [stated](#) that there will be no immigration reform so long as Barack Obama is President; something that they say is unsurprising.

One thing that could cause another headache for President Obama is Senator Chuck Schumer's (D-NY) just-announced opposition to the Iran deal, [reports](#) *Roll Call's* [#WGBD](#). They say that Obama is relying on Senate Democrats to sustain a presidential veto of Congress' likely motion to disapprove of the agreement, and that the disagreement of the number 3 Senate Democrat may complicate the White House's 'full-court press'.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

Staying on the topic of the Iran deal, *Townhall* [reckons](#) that it is Obama's foreign policy Obamacare, in that it is both destructive and 'legacy-driven'. They argue that the deal is the culmination of the President's dangerously flawed philosophy that national security can be enhanced through appeasement. *The Hill's Congress blog* is

similarly negative about the deal, [writing](#) this week that it exposes Obama's double standards. They say that he is pushing the deal despite public opposition, and that it will allow Iran to give more assistance to the Assad regime in Syria, and this contrasts with Obama's refusal to fight the Assad regime in 2013 because of public opposition.

The Atlantic, meanwhile, says that the Iran deal's critics [will probably lose](#), mostly because all the signs point to the deal going into effect. Obama himself struck out against those who opposed the deal, branding them 'warmongers', [reports](#) *Informed Comment*. On Saturday, *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that GOP



Mitch McConnell Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Senators John McCain (AZ) and Lindsey Graham (SC) have teamed up to deride what they say is Obama's 'feckless' foreign policy, and explicitly cited the Iran deal.

On Monday *The American Interest* [writes](#) that the White House is putting the blame for a recent mass hack of the Office of Personnel Management on China. They say that the Obama administration has promised to retaliate – though by just what means is still a gray area.

Obamacare and health policy

Townhall [looks ahead](#) to what Obamacare will have in store by 2018. They say that in three years' time, many employers will face a 40 percent tax on health insurance benefits that are currently received by employees tax free.

The economy and society

Crooks & Liars [reports](#) on recent comments from former President, Jimmy Carter, that the US is an oligarchy, not a Democracy, and that 'unlimited political bribery' is the essence of winning a presidential nomination. *The Atlantic* also looks at the state of American democracy, reminding us that the Voting Rights Act is 50 years old this week. They [say](#) that there are deep divisions over its current role, with the Republican Party feeling that it is a matter of the past, and Democrats arguing that state-based voting restrictions show that it is still very important.

In light of the current debate over the funding of Planned Parenthood, *The Daily Signal* [asks](#) if women would be OK without it. They write that some pro-life organizations say yes, while others say no.



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Moving on to economic issues, *Wonkblog* this week [looks](#) at what raising the minimum wage to \$15 would actually mean in every state. For example, \$15 would go much further in Macon, Georgia where prices are more than 12 percent below the national average than in New York, where they are 22 percent more expensive. *The Fix* has an interesting [piece](#) on Tuesday which examines the gap between black and white unemployment. Apparently black unemployment has exceeded that of whites by at least two-thirds every month that the Bureau of Labor Statistics has been keeping records.

This week also saw Puerto Rico default on a \$58 million bond payment. *The Hill's Congress blog* [says](#) that this shows that sovereign debt crises are no longer just a foreign problem.

And finally...

The Fix looks at how running for the presidency [makes you fat](#).

National Journal has the [ten worst moments](#) in presidential debates dating back to 1960's debate between Nixon and Kennedy.

Senator Ted Cruz found an interesting use for a machine gun this week – cooking bacon, [reports](#) *Crooks & Liars*.

Featured image: Vice President Joe Biden Credit: [jstreetdotorg](#) (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-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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