



THE FILIBUSTER

A histpology.co.uk briefing for A-level Politics

ISSUE • 8 AUGUST – 22 AUGUST 2026

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This briefing covers the most significant developments in US politics from 8 to 22 August 2026 for A-level Politics students. It was an unusually busy fortnight combining institutional and personality-driven news: intensifying scrutiny of a uniquely influential presidential aide, an escalation of the White House ballroom dispute at the Supreme Court, two further examples of unilateral presidential power over the military and trade, and two further stories about senior political figures managing their own public image.

THE WEEK'S BIG STORY

WHO IS NATALIE?

A senator's jibe and questions over a missing security clearance have turned Natalie Harp, the aide who prints out Trump's Truth Social posts for him, into the week's most talked-about story.

16–22 AUGUST 2026

At a campaign rally in Atlanta on 16 August, Senator Jon Ossoff (Democrat, Georgia) attacked President Trump's priorities, saying Trump "doesn't want to do the job" and instead "wants to build his ballroom and travel with Natalie".

The remark was aimed at Natalie Harp, 35, a former anchor for the pro-Trump network One America News who now holds the formal title of special assistant to the president and executive assistant to the president. Colleagues have nicknamed her the 'human printer' for her habit of carrying a portable printer to hand Trump paper copies of flattering online posts and news coverage.

Ossoff's remark drew fresh attention to reporting, first published by MS NOW, that Harp worked inside the White House for over a year without completing a routine security clearance (the vetting process

that determines who may access sensitive government information), reportedly declining to finish the process until Trump intervened personally. Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt rejected the claim, saying Harp “has a security clearance like everyone else”. With Leavitt due to leave her post at the end of August (see below), Trump has reportedly joked to advisers that Harp herself could take over as press secretary, alongside more conventional contenders such as the commentator Scott Jennings.

WHY IT MATTERS This story is a useful case study in presidential patronage (the practice of rewarding political loyalty with access or office, rather than formal qualification) and in the informal influence unelected aides can hold inside the West Wing. It also raises a genuine accountability question: security clearances exist precisely to vet who gets access to sensitive information, and Ossoff’s public criticism is itself a reminder that Congress’s power to scrutinise the executive is not limited to formal votes or hearings.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PLO 3A.3 (US Presidency) and 3A.2 (US Congress); AQA 7152 3.2.1.3 (The executive branch of government: President) and 3.2.1.2 (The legislative branch of government: Congress).

CHECKS ON THE EXECUTIVE



Trump asks the Supreme Court to let ballroom work resume

14 AUGUST 2026

On 14 August, the Trump administration filed an emergency application asking the Supreme Court to lift the lower-court injunction (a court order preventing an action from continuing while a legal dispute is resolved) that has halted above-ground construction of the White House ballroom since the DC Circuit's ruling on 7 August, covered in last week's issue. The Solicitor General, D. John Sauer, argued that continuing the pause would threaten presidential security and improperly interfere with the executive branch, and that the project is now “beyond the point of no return”. Chief Justice John Roberts gave the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the body that brought the original case, until the following Tuesday to respond.

The case, formally *National Park Service v. National Trust for Historic Preservation*, is a direct escalation of the dispute over whether Congress, rather than the president alone, must authorise a structure of this scale. The lower court's order was due to take full effect from 21 August, so the timing of the Supreme Court's response has real practical significance for whether building work can resume before autumn.

WHY IT MATTERS This is a genuinely live sequel to a core separation of powers dispute, showing the appeals process in real time: a Circuit Court ruling against the executive, followed by an emergency application to the Supreme Court for a stay (a court order pausing a lower ruling while a higher court considers the case). It is a strong example for students of how quickly a case can move through the federal court hierarchy once “emergency” or “shadow docket” applications are used, and of the competing constitutional claims at stake: Congress's Article I power of the purse against the executive's claims about presidential security and institutional independence.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PLO 3A.3 (US Presidency) and 3A.4 (US Supreme Court and Civil Rights); AQA 7152 3.2.1.3 (The executive branch of government: President) and 3.2.1.4 (The judicial branch of government).

PRESIDENTIAL POWER: MILITARY, SECURITY AND TRADE



Trump orders US Navy to abandon electromagnetic catapults for future carriers

13 AUGUST 2026

On 13 August, President Trump signed a National Security Presidential Memorandum (a directive used to set policy on national security matters, with a similar legal standing to an executive order) instructing the Secretary of Defense to replace the electromagnetic aircraft launch system, or EMALS (the system that catapults aircraft off a carrier's deck using electromagnetic force rather than steam), on the US Navy's next Ford-class aircraft carrier with older steam-powered catapults. The order applies to the fourth ship in the class, the future USS Doris Miller (CVN-81); the first three Ford-class carriers, already built or under construction with EMALS installed, are not affected. The Pentagon has sixty days to report on the cost, timeline and industrial capacity needed, since no US shipyard has built a steam catapult system in around twenty years.

WHY IT MATTERS This is a clean illustration of the president's role as commander-in-chief (the constitutional title, under Article II, giving the president formal control over the armed forces) directing a specific, technical area of military procurement by unilateral order, without new legislation from Congress. It is a useful case study for discussing the limits, if any, on presidential authority over defence policy, and for weighing formal constitutional power against the practical constraints of cost, industrial capacity and Pentagon expertise that can blunt a presidential directive in practice.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PLO 3A.3 (US Presidency); AQA 7152 3.2.1.3 (The executive branch of government: President).



Secret Service decoy flight for Trump revealed

REPORTED 10 AUGUST 2026

It emerged this week that, as President Trump left the NATO summit in Ankara on 8 July, US intelligence agencies had identified a credible threat that Iranian-linked operatives intended to target his aircraft with a shoulder-fired or surface-to-air missile. In response, the Secret Service arranged for Trump to be moved secretly onto a smaller military transport aircraft while the plane that the public and press believed to be Air Force One departed Turkey without him, acting as a decoy. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent were aboard the decoy aircraft, while Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth travelled with the president; the president's real location was reportedly kept from most White House staff and journalists for several hours.

WHY IT MATTERS Reported over a month after it happened, this story gives students a rare, detailed insight into the scale of the executive branch's national security apparatus (the network of agencies, such as the Secret Service and the intelligence community, that support presidential decision-making and protection), and how it operates independently of the president's public schedule. It is a strong example for discussing continuity of government and presidential security protocols, and raises a genuine evaluative question about transparency: whether, and when, the public and even senior officials should be told about threats to the president's safety.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PLO 3A.3 (US Presidency); AQA 7152 3.2.1.3 (The executive branch of government: President).



New tariffs imposed on imported drones

14 AUGUST 2026

On 14 August, the White House announced new tariffs (taxes charged on imported goods) on drones and their components, citing overreliance on foreign, particularly Chinese, manufacturers as a national security risk. Larger or more sensitive drones face a 100% tariff and smaller, less sensitive drones a 25% tariff, with reduced rates of 15% for the EU, Japan, Switzerland, South Korea and Taiwan, and 10% for the UK. The tariffs were imposed under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act 1962 (a law allowing the president to restrict imports found to threaten national security), rather than the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) route that the Supreme Court ruled unlawful for broad tariffs back in February.

WHY IT MATTERS This shows the administration adapting its legal strategy after the Supreme Court's February ruling against IEEPA tariffs, switching to a different, narrower statutory authority that the courts have historically been more willing to accept. It is a good example of delegated legislative power (authority that Congress has given to the executive by statute, rather than power the Constitution grants the president directly), and of arguments about the "imperial presidency", since Congress passed Section 232 in 1962 but has not voted on these specific tariffs.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PLO 3A.3 (US Presidency) and 3A.5 (US Democracy and Participation, in relation to interest groups affected by trade policy); AQA 7152 3.2.1.3 (The executive branch of government: President).

THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE & CONGRESS: PEOPLE AND MEDIA



Karoline Leavitt to step down as White House Press Secretary

12 AUGUST 2026

On 12 August, President Trump announced that Karoline Leavitt, the White House Press Secretary, will leave the administration at the end of August. Leavitt, 28, is the youngest press secretary in US history; she had returned from maternity leave only weeks earlier, following the birth of her second child on 1 May, before deciding to step back to spend more time with her young family. Trump said she will remain

involved as one of his “top outside advisors” and will work with the Republican Party ahead of the November midterm elections.

WHY IT MATTERS The Press Secretary is the main formal link between the West Wing and the press corps, briefing journalists on the president's behalf and shaping the administration's daily media strategy. Leavitt's departure is a useful, human example of the pressures and high turnover within the Executive Office of the President (EOP) (the cluster of staff and agencies that directly support the president, distinct from the wider federal bureaucracy), and a chance to discuss the podium's role in agenda-setting: shaping which issues the public and media focus on.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PLO 3A.3 (US Presidency); AQA 7152 3.2.1.3 (The executive branch of government: President).



Ocasio-Cortez shares fertility treatment online amid 2028 speculation

9 AUGUST 2026

Over the weekend of 8 to 9 August, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez announced on Instagram that she is undergoing egg-freezing treatment, documenting parts of the process, including the medication and injections involved, in an effort to destigmatise the procedure for other professional women. She said the decision was about “feeling more in control” of her life, and that she had been saving for the procedure for some time. The announcement drew both support and criticism, including from conservative commentators, with reporting suggesting some White House aides privately considered the attacks unhelpful to Republicans, and it comes amid continuing speculation about whether Ocasio-Cortez will run for the Senate or the presidency in 2028.

WHY IT MATTERS This is a clear example of a politician using direct-to-voter social media to control their own narrative and build a public profile, rather than relying on traditional broadcast or print media. For students, it is a useful case study in candidate image-building and the personalisation of politics (the tendency for political communication to focus on individual character and personal story rather than only policy), as well as a live example of how gender and family life continue to feature in coverage of women in American politics.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PLO 3A.5 (US Democracy and Participation) and 3A.6 (Comparative theories / UK-US comparative politics, if comparing candidate media strategies); AQA 7152 3.2.1.6 (Political parties) and 3.2.2.4 (Comparative politics: electoral and party systems).



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