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## Daily Dispatches

# Midday Roundup: Too rich to go to jail

## NEWSWORTHY

By LEIGH JONES

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**Coddled? A Texas judge has reaffirmed**

Associated Press/Photo by LM Otero

**Ethan Couch, center, sits in juvenile court.**

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/02/05/no-jail-for-teen/5242173/> her December decision to give a teen who pleaded guilty to four counts of intoxication manslaughter 10 years of probation instead of the 20 years in jail prosecutors asked for. The state's lawyers were back in court this week asking Judge Jean Boyd to reconsider. Victims' families say Ethan Couch, 17, is getting a free pass because his parents are wealthy. During his trial, Couch's lawyers mounted what has been dubbed an "affluenza defense." Couch should not be held accountable for his actions, they said, because his wealthy parents coddled him. Couch grew up with a sense of entitlement and developed poor judgment, they argued. Boyd agreed, and sentenced the teen to probation and an indefinite stay in an expensive drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott, who is running for governor, said his office is trying to determine whether Couch's sentence can be appealed.

**Power grid attack. New revelations**

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/02/06/2013-sniper-attack-on-power-grid-still-concern-in-washington-and-for-utilities/> about a sniper attack on a California power substation are raising concerns the incident might have been a dress rehearsal for a larger terror attack on America's electricity infrastructure. After investigating the April incident, the FBI determined it had no connection to terrorism. Attackers cut telephone

cables and fired more than 100 shots into Pacific Gas & Electric's Metcalf transmission substation, knocking out 17 transformers. The power company managed to avoid a blackout but spent almost a month repairing the damage. Despite the official determination, Jon Wellinghoff, former chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, called the attack "the most significant incident of domestic terrorism involving the U.S. power grid that has ever occurred." Wellinghoff believes the attack was terrorism because bullet casings found at the scene had no fingerprints and shooters were pre-positioned. Wellinghoff and others are advocating for tighter security at the nation's power facilities.

**Astonishing impact.** While the Obama administration is downplaying a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report that concludes Obamacare will deliver a sucker punch to the still frail U.S. economy, researchers from Duke University say the blow could be more like a knock out. In December 2013, Duke researchers surveyed chief financial officers about the effect Obamacare, adopted as the Affordable Care Act (ACA), would have on their hiring decisions. Nearly half of them said it had created a reluctance to hire full-time workers. More than 40 percent said it would shift hiring toward part-time workers. And 44 percent said their companies planned to reduce health benefits. "I doubt the advocates of this legislation anticipated the negative impact on employment," said Campbell Harvey, a professor in Duke's business school. "The impact on the real economy is astonishing. Nearly one-third of firms may either terminate employees or hire fewer people in the future as a direct result of ACA. Yesterday's CBO report got some attention—but it significantly understates the legislation's impact."

**Thanks, but no thanks.** Perhaps because of the Obamacare disaster, President Barack Obama is telling some Senate Democrats he'll **stay away** [<http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/06/politics/obama-democrat-senators/>] from their reelection battles. Democrats hold a 55-45 majority in the Senate but have 21 seats up for grabs in this year's election. A number of them are vulnerable to Republican challengers, and with the historical precedent of the party that holds the White House losing seats in midterm elections, Democrats fear they could be in for a rough ride. Sen. Mark Begich, a Democrat from Republican-leaning Alaska, told CNN last week that he wouldn't be interested in campaigning with the president if he offered. And he's not the only one. Ouch.



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