

The bright side of filibuster reform, tensions rise with China, and has immigration reform stalled in Congress? – US national blog round up for 23 – 29 November

USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson, looks at the best in political blogging from the Beltway. Our round-up of state blogs will follow on Saturday afternoon.

Affordable Care

As Thanksgiving week began, the administration's difficulties with the rollout of Affordable Care (Obamacare) still loomed large in blog commentaries. On Saturday, *Wonkblog* takes a close look at how all the [U.S. states stack up in terms of Obamacare enrolment](#). They find some huge disparities; for instance, while California (which has a state exchange) has signed up over 80,000 people, Oregon's figure is zero. The *New Yorker* takes an in-depth look at [President Obama's travails](#) over the healthcare reform's roll-out, saying that this time, his brand alone isn't enough to preserve his legislative achievement of Affordable Care – he will have to fight state to state.

American Thinker [looks](#) at the procurement of the healthcare.gov website, saying that the group building the site, CMS, only realized at the last minute that it would have difficulty producing the financial management and accounting aspects needed, and then gave a no-bid contract to another firm to do the work. Meanwhile *The Foundry* [reports](#) on the substantial cuts one family in California have to make in order to afford the 150 percent premium increase they are facing under Obamacare in the new year.

Perrsppectives takes on the idea that Obamacare will mean that employers will pass on greater costs to their workers. They counter this by [saying](#) that even before Obamacare, the number of Americans with workplace-based coverage has been dropping since 2001, and that employers have also already been hiking employee contributions, raising deductibles, and dropping spousal coverage. On Tuesday, *The Monkey Cage* [looks](#) to the government's Medicare program for lessons on Obamacare's future. They argue that if Obamacare can survive its rocky start, then the personal experiences of those who sign up will start to improve public opinion about the reform.

Outside the Beltway reports that the Supreme Court has accepted appeals to two cases involving Obamacare's [contraceptive mandate](#) (which require all employer-based health care plans to provide coverage for contraceptives), saying that when decided, these claims may have large impact on future religious liberty claims.

Senate filibuster rules and the 'nuclear option'

Last week the Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid, pushed through the so-called '[nuclear option](#)' rule change so that a simple majority of votes would be all that is needed from now on for most presidential appointments (excepting the Supreme Court) to go through. In the wake of this move, many have expected the Democratic Senate to now go on a spree of appointments – *The Atlantic* [says](#) that we shouldn't expect this to be the case. The argue that the 231 nominations currently awaiting confirmation can still be held up by existing obstructive tactics in



Will healthcare reform break the bank? Credit 401(K) 2012 (Creative Commons BY SA)

the Senate. *The Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at whether or not the 'nuclear option' was taken in order to speed up the filling of vacancies for over-worked courts, or to fill them with Democrats.

Outside the Beltway looks on the [bright side](#) of the filibuster reform, by saying that now Obama can actually fire people, given that confirmation of their replacement will be (relatively) easier, and that higher quality candidates may now be more interested in appointment, as they will not have to wait so long.

Government and the Beltway

Looking at Vance McAllister's surprise win in Louisiana's 5th Congressional District last week, *National Journal* [argues](#) that this shows that Americans are increasingly turning to outsiders, now that public disapproval of Washington is at an all-time high. In a similar vein, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that Democrats' failure on Obamacare, and the GOP's on financial regulation shows that America seems to be stuck with inept versions of parties, something they put down to the strength of ideological orthodoxies and interest-group capture.



Credit: Jamelle Bouie (Creative Commons BY)

United Liberty [reports](#) that the Republican Party now holds a 49 to 47 percent lead over Democrats in a generic Congressional ballot, which they put down to the ongoing Obamacare meltdown. Meanwhile, *Crooks & Liars* points out that it's been a while since we talked about [Rand Paul](#) (the Junior Senator for Kentucky), and that he is heading to Detroit to do some African-American outreach for the GOP.

This week President Obama told supporters at a fundraiser that he is 'not particularly ideological' – *The Lonely Conservative* [claims](#) instead that he is one of the most left wing Presidents ever elected. Still on the topic of ideology, *National Journal* [looks](#) at Charlie Crist's campaign to regain the Florida governorship, this time as a Democrat, and how his (second) embrace of Obama may hurt his chances of winning in 2014.

With little time left in the legislative calendar due to the impending holiday season, there is little likelihood of any further moves by Congress towards immigration reform. While the House Majority Whip, Republican Kevin McCarthy insisted that there would be movement on immigration reform soon, *Crooks & Liars* [says](#) they 'will believe it when they see it'. Meanwhile, *Doug Ross* [says](#) that the Republican establishment is trying to find new ways to 'ram' through an amnesty for undocumented migrants due to demands for cheaper technology talent from Silicon Valley. *National Journal* [says](#) that with so few joint legislative days left this year, there is no longer enough time for Congress to agree a new budget deal before 13 December, as had been originally agreed.

On Thanksgiving, it is tradition for the President to pardon a turkey. *The Atlantic* takes this an opportunity to [look](#) at President Obama's 'stingy' record of Presidential pardons, asking why a man who was imprisoned in 2004 for 55-years on a charge of possessing a firearm, and selling marijuana has not been granted clemency.

Foreign policy

On Saturday, *Via Meadia* looks at the Obama administration's '[pivot to Asia](#)', something that he says has fallen down the policy priority list in the President's second term. He says that a recent speech by national security adviser, Susan Rice, shows that Obama has not forgotten about this 'pivot', and that a stronger focus on Asia

should be key to U.S. foreign policy. As the week unfolds, tensions between the U.S. and China build after a group of unarmed U.S. B-52 bombers overflow islands disputed between China and Japan. *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that Vice-President Joe Biden will be visiting Asia next week amid these tensions.

Over the weekend, commentary continued on the deal between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, and Germany, over the country's nuclear program.

Joshua Pundit [says](#) that not one of Israel's concerns were addressed in the crafting of the deal, and that it is essentially an acceptance by President Obama (and the West) of a nuclear

armed Iran. On the other side, *Informed Comment* [says](#) that the deal has averted the 'neo-conservative' plot towards an Iran-US war, and that more hard-bargaining negotiations are still to come. According to *Daily Kos*, the party that 'like to use bombs' (the GOP) is [unhappy with the deal](#), and are saying that Obama has used it to divert attention away from Obamacare's difficulties. *Hit & Run* takes on all those on the right who have said that the agreement is a [re-run of the Munich](#) deal of 1938, which did not prevent World War II, arguing that there is little else that could have been done to confront the situation, short of war.

The Atlantic [wonders](#) whether or not the deal is, for Obama, the same as President Nixon's visit to China in 1972, who similarly broke through a frozen geopolitical situation despite opposition at home. Meanwhile, *American Thinker* [reckons](#) that President Reagan would not have signed the deal.

The economy and society

Wonkblog [reports](#) that homelessness in America has dropped by 9 percent since 2007, but writes that, given uneven progress across the country (it has risen by more than 25 percent in the same time in some states), this fall may not last.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York [blog](#) takes a close look at how markets react during Federal Reserve press conferences – what they call '[the announcement effect](#)'.

Retailer Walmart is [offering](#) employees extra pay for working on Thanksgiving – something that *Daily Kos* takes them to task for, as what they are offering is based on an average from the previous two weeks. This may be less than it should be, as employees are likely to have had hours cut prior to the holidays. On the other side, *Red State* [writes](#) that unions (which planned Walmart protests this week) are simply frustrated with the store for offering non-union positions, and therefore denying the unions income.

On Sunday, *The Lonely Conservative* argues that for many, a college degree is now [no longer worth it](#), with alternatives such as technical and vocational training becoming more attractive. Still on the topic of young people, *The Atlantic* [argues](#) that while unemployment for 15-24 year olds in America is around 16 percent, it may be a sign that young people are simply waiting longer to get the skills they need for the jobs that they want.

And finally...

With last week's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, *Caffeinated Politics* topically looks into what happened to the [first coffin that Kennedy was placed in](#) whilst in Dallas.



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With Thanksgiving this week, *Wonkblog* has a [guide](#) to surviving Obamacare debates over the dinner table.

Still on the holiday theme, *The Monkey Cage* looks at the [bipartisanship of turkeys](#).

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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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