

## A new budget deal, America's declining labor force, and Paul Ryan for House Speaker? – US national blog round up for 7 – 13 December

*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.*

### Budget deal

The big political news this week was the announcement of a budget deal from the Republican and Democratic heads of the House and Senate Budget Committees, Paul Ryan and Patty Murray. On Tuesday, the day of the announcement, *Crooks and Liars* [says](#) that the deal has been able to stave off further Sequester cuts as well as some deficit reduction provisions. Reaction from some Republicans to the deal was negative [according](#) to *The Foundry*, mostly due to the spending rises that were included. On Wednesday, *Hit & Run* [explains](#) how little the budget deal 'really matters', as it needs to be seen in the context of generally expanding government spending since the end of World War II. Also on Wednesday, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) that House Speaker, John A. Boehner, called Republicans opposed to the deal 'ridiculous', and argue that he should have instead taken a more conciliatory tone. Meanwhile, in the lead-up to Thursday's vote on the deal in the House *The Atlantic* wonders if House Conservatives will [wreck the deal](#) given opposition from groups like Heritage Action and Americans for Prosperity, who urged Representatives to vote "No".

On Thursday, despite the opposition, the House overwhelmingly approved the budget deal, [writes](#) *Hit & Run*, though 62 Republicans and 32 Democrats voted against it. In the wake of the deal, *PoliticusUSA* says that it is obvious that Democrats did all the compromising, given that it contains spending cuts which reinforce Republican 'austerity madness'. Finally, *National Journal* [writes](#) that while the deal may have reduced the likelihood of Paul Ryan becoming a Presidential candidate in 2016, his chances of eventually succeeding John Boehner as speaker sometime in the future have definitely been raised.



### Affordable Care

With so much focus on the Congressional budget deal, the controversy over the rollout of Affordable Care (Obamacare) took more of a backseat compared to recent weeks. On Saturday, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that more people signed up to Obamacare via the federal exchange in two days this week than had in the previous month. *Workblog* [echoes](#) this, saying that since October, 1.2 million people have gained coverage under Obamacare, and that enrollment is likely to pick up in the lead up to coverage beginning on 1 January.

Republican critiques of the President's flagship program continued this week, though, with *The Foundry* [claiming](#) that it is a bad deal for young adults, because of high premiums, and the likelihood that not many of them will qualify for subsidies. This could potentially hurt Obamacare as the program relies on young healthy people joining in order to help to subsidise older adults who are more likely to have health problems.

## Government and the Beltway

While this week saw an agreement to prevent another government shutdown in 2014, *American Thinker* [looks](#) back to October's shutdown, and argues that Republican Senators Ted Cruz, and Mike Leigh were successful in their shutdown tactics because the Democrats proved that they were willing to do almost anything to protect Obamacare, meaning that they now 'own' the policy, something that has been recently hurting them in the polls.

*Outside the Beltway* says that both [President Obama](#) and the [Tea Party](#) are slipping in recent polls. While Obama's poor numbers are mostly due to the troubled rollout of the Affordable Care Act, the Tea Party may be suffering because of its recent obstructive tactics in Congress. *National Journal* [says](#) that labor unions have emerged as an unusual supporter of the 'business wing' of the GOP in that party's 'civil war', with the aim of defeating Tea Party backed candidates in Republican primaries. On the other side of the aisle, *American Thinker* has [more](#) evidence of President Obama's declining support from within his own party over the Obamacare rollout, writing that 'smarter' Democrats are distancing themselves from him in the lead up to the 2014 and 2016 elections.

This week *PoliticoUSA* [bemoaned](#) the fact that, with the legislative year winding down, the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress has been the least productive on record, with only 55 laws passed in 2013. Despite Congress' unproductive year, *National Journal* [reports](#) on a recent poll which says that a majority of Americans believe that Congress will be able to pass major legislation in 2014.

*The Atlantic* looks at the [rise in influence of junior Senators](#). While in previous years, length of tenure meant power and importance, relatively newly minted Senators like Ted Cruz and Elizabeth Warren are already making waves. Meanwhile, *The New Yorker* [takes](#) a close look at the history of women's representation in the Senate.

## Foreign policy

Last week brought the sad news of the passing of Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first black President and anti-apartheid campaigner. Mandela's death prompted reaction from both Republicans and Democrats: *American Thinker* [says](#) that President Ronald Reagan had been instrumental in freeing South Africa from apartheid, with his policy of 'constructive engagement', which was aimed at avoiding a communist takeover of the country. Meanwhile, *PoliticoUSA* argues that Mandela was truly [anti-Reagan](#). *Outside the Beltway* reflects on conservative [commentary](#) in the wake of Mandela's death, saying while much has been positive and praiseworthy, some on the far right have been very negative because of Mandela's previous links with communist groups.

President Obama attended Nelson Mandela's funeral on Wednesday, with the White House later having to fend off Republican criticism after he shook hands with the Cuban leader, Raul Castro, [according](#) to *Crooks & Liars*.

Looking back to the deal with Iran over its nuclear program from earlier this month, *The American Prospect* [says](#) that while a majority of Americans do support the deal, Congress is moving to impose another round of sanctions on the country, which would contravene the terms of the new agreement.

## The economy and society

On Sunday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at the problem of declining test scores of U.S. teenagers, according to the latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study. They say that while the test scores are below average compared to the rest of the world for many subjects, the way the test is run, and results reported, mean that comparisons are not a simple matter.

Last week President Obama gave a speech on inequality in America, with many commentators subsequently calling for an increase in the minimum wage level to address this. *The American Prospect* [rejects](#) these calls, saying that most minimum wage jobs are low-skilled and done by young people, and that higher minimum wages

reduce employment and may even increase fast-food companies' pace of automation, which would further reduce employment. Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at whether or not people believe that women have achieved equality in America. They find that while most believe that society has become more equal, they still feel that more needs to be done to bring about greater equality in the workplace. *Workblog* then looks at [America's declining labor force](#) (63 percent of working age Americans have a job or are looking for work, down from 66 percent in 2007), saying that much of decline is due to the increase in retirements, in addition to the poor economic conditions brought upon by the 2008 financial crisis.



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*The Hill's Congress blog* [says](#) that the Environmental Protection Agency is pushing to regulate pollution from power plants that occurs across states. They say that people in states with 'cleaner' power plants may be forced to pay for cleaning up 'dirtier' plants in neighboring states.

This week is the one year anniversary of the tragic Newtown school shooting where 26 people, including 20 children, were killed. In light of the anniversary, *Hit & Run* [says](#) that, despite the best efforts of politicians, Americans still have little appetite for further restrictions on guns, mostly because tougher gun laws are not likely to restrict criminals' access to them.

### **And finally...**

With many reflective pieces this week that refer to Nelson Mandela as South Africa's 'first democratically elected President', *Outside the Beltway* looks at who [America's first similarly elected President would be](#) (i.e. with full suffrage for all). Considering 1965's Voting Rights Act gave the vote to many black Americans, Richard Nixon may be the likeliest candidate.

In light of the Republican furore over President Obama's handshake with Raul Castro this week, *Informed Comment* [looks](#) at all the times in the past a President has shaken hands with a dictator.

*The Atlantic* has an interesting [look](#) at how people consume news in the U.S. compared with Japan and Europe.

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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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