

Christie embroiled in ‘Bridgegate’, rail troubles in California and the end of the five day work week in Wisconsin? – US state blog round up for 3 – 10 January

USApp Assistant Editor, **Natalie Allen**, and Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson** look at the week in U.S. state blogging. [Click here](#) for our weekly roundup of national blogs.

Northeast

Undoubtedly the biggest story across the states this week was the unfolding saga of ‘Bridgegate’ in New Jersey. What began as mostly [rumor](#) in late December now blew up into a full political scandal when emails and text messages were obtained by the media that showed that aides of Republic Governor of New Jersey, Chris Christie, had discussed the closure of lanes on the George Washington Bridge connecting New Jersey and New York (also one of the busiest bridges in the world) in order to punish the mayor of Fort Lee, for not supporting him in last year’s election. *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that while the story had previously seemed to be relatively unsubstantial, now that it has been linked to two top Christie aides, it creates problems, as the Governor had previously stated that no-one from his administration had been involved with the lane closures, and had told him ‘everything we know’ about the closure at a briefing last week, [according](#) to *Daily Kos*.



Credit: George Pankewytc (Creative Commons: BY 2.0)

On Thursday, at a lengthy press conference, Christie apologized for the conduct of his staffers, maintaining that he had no knowledge or involvement with the bridge’s lane closures, and announced that he had fired his deputy chief of staff, who had sent one of the released emails, calling for “traffic problems in Ft. Lee”. Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* [says that](#) we should be skeptical of those that say that the scandal will end Christie’s career, and that we should wait for further revelations before writing the Governor off. *American Thinker* [says](#) that Christie’s denials of involvement are problematic, and even if he wasn’t involved in the closure, this fits into the liberal narrative that casts him as a ‘bully’. *Wonkblog* echoes this, [writing](#) that no matter what comes of this particular scandal, Christie’s problem is that he really is a bully, and that this, more than anything else, is likely to hurt his 2016

presidential chances. *Simply Left Behind* [examines](#) the semantics of the debate in terms of Chris Christie's often discussed weight, looking at a story that seems to be a 'cheap shot' against him.

On Thursday, in a hearing before the New Jersey Assembly, David Wildstein (a former Christie appointee) refused to answer any questions about his role in the closure of the George Washington Bridge. *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that the Assembly has held him in contempt as a result. That same day, Christie scotched any thought that he might resign, telling a reporter "Oh God no", when asked if he might, [reports](#) *PolitickerNJ*.

Still in New Jersey, *Save Jersey* [calls](#) for a bill to stop state employees from "double dipping"—that is, collecting a pension from a former government job after being hired into a new position in the government—to finally be passed in 2014. The bill has been held up in committee whose Chair has been a "double-dipper" since 2011. Also in the Garden State, *PolitickerNJ* [reports](#) that Pakistani-American Azra Baig will be sworn into her new position on the South Brunswick Board of Education, making her the first female with Asian American roots to serve in this position and the only woman on the nine member board.

Moving on to New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo appears to have had a change of heart on the topic of medical marijuana. *Capital Confidential* [notes](#) that although Cuomo has previously opposed legalization of medical uses of the drug, he now appears ready to approve its prescription in some narrow circumstances, possibly in an attempt to raise his approval ratings in an election year. Meanwhile, *State of Politics* [profiles](#) one of Cuomo's former aides, Peter Ragone, who New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has hired to serve as his senior adviser.

New Hampshire Journal [welcomes](#) former Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown to their state in the wake of his recent move. Though no modern senator has ever represented two states, they urge Brown to run against Jeanne Shaheen (D) for Senate, pointing to Shaheen's vulnerability and the weak field of potential Republican candidates as an opportune moment for him.

Capital & Main [reports](#) on Maine Governor Paul LePage's recent comments at the Maine Agricultural Trades Show, where he told attendees that Maine needs to start utilizing its youth by lowering the legal working age, which is currently 16. LePage stated that "there is nothing wrong with being a paperboy at 12 years old, or at a store sorting bottles at 12 years old."

High school seniors in Philadelphia public schools are facing more stress than usual during college application season, [writes](#) *The Daily Kos*. Budget cuts from Republican Governor Tom Corbett have left only two counsellors employed at Central High to tend the needs of 2400 students, leaving the counsellors with insufficient time to write recommendation letters for college applications and even less time to guide students through the application and selection process.

South

In Virginia, Republican John Whitbeck, who infamously made an anti-Semitic "joke" at a rally for gubernatorial candidate Ken Cuccinelli last September, has [come under fire](#) from *Blue Virginia* after his campaign made a series of robo-calls touting Whitbeck's commitment to diversity. Meanwhile, *Bearing Drift* [is puzzled](#) by Governor Terry McAuliffe's choices for his cabinet, which include Levar Stoney, who is known for his involvement in knifing the tires of Republican operatives in 2004, and Anne Holton, wife of former governor (and current Senator) Tim Kaine and daughter of another former governor, Linwood Holton.

In Maryland, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) on the state's plans to cap hospital spending and set prices, all with the aim of cutting \$330 million in federal healthcare spending.

In North Carolina, *BlueNC* [reports](#) that the state's two major newspapers are both calling for the end to the death penalty, pointing to the public's declining support for capital punishment, and the five death row inmates that have been exonerated in North Carolina since 1999. *Crooks and Liars* [look at](#) a new documentary report from Bill Moyers that investigates how Republicans have been so successful in North Carolina, once considered the most progressive state in the South and invites readers to attend a rally in Raleigh on February 8th.

Blogging While Blue [predicts](#) that same-sex marriage will come to Georgia quicker than expected, after a District Court Judge overturned a similar ban in Utah in December. *Peach Pundit* [looks](#) at another reform movement in

Georgia—the push for decriminalization or outright legalization of marijuana in the state—concluding that the state falls towards the bottom of the list for places most likely to make changes to marijuana laws.

In Florida, Marco Rubio responds to what he views as the failure of American social programs in the so-called War on Poverty in a [YouTube video](#). [SaintPetersBlog notes](#) that the release of the video corresponded with Lyndon B. Johnson's 1964 State of the Union speech and while Rubio condemns the money wasted on social programs because of LBJ's Great Society and announces his "real agenda" for the country, he does not explain how he would implement this agenda. Rubio also caught [the Shark Tank's eye](#) this week when he successfully blocked the nomination of Judge William Thomas, who would have been the first openly gay black man to be a federal judge, due to concerns about the judge's record on several high profile cases. Staying in Florida, [FreakOutNation reports](#) that Congressman Trey Radel has completed his 28 day stint in rehab after he was caught purchasing cocaine in late October. While Radel claims his treatment was "life-changing" and says that he is excited to get back to work. [FreakOutNation](#) wonders how he will fare considering the cocaine recidivism rate is great than 65%. Finally, [StPetersblog reports](#) that Florida has the leanest state government in the country –just \$37 per resident – but wonders if this is a good thing.

[Burnt Orange Report looks at](#) the impact the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) has already had in Texas, in spite of the Texas government's active attempts to repeal the law, noting that now that people have purchased plans through the exchanges repealing the law just got a whole lot harder.

[Left in Alabama examines](#) issues the Constitution Revision Commission is facing in revising the education article of the state constitution. In its current form, the article contains racist language and denies that students have a right to a public education. While all agreed that the racist language should be removed, debate over whether there is a right to a state-funded education may prevent amendment from passing entirely.

[According to FreakOutNation](#) a State Representative in Kentucky accidentally fired her semi-automatic handgun in her Capitol office this week. Her explanation, "It happens".

Midwest

In Ohio, Ted Stevenot, a Tea Party leader who announced he would launch a primary run against sitting Governor John Kasich has changed his mind. [Third Base Politics notes](#) that while Stevenot does not give a reason for the abrupt change of heart, the news came within 48 hours after they published a story about his running mate's previous tax problems.

[PoliticMO reports](#) that in spite of Governor Jay Nixon's best efforts (including a \$75,000 special session of the General Assembly) to land an agreement to base production of Boeing's new 777x airplanes in Missouri, the company has decided to keep production at its Washington plant.

In Wisconsin, [Blue Cheddar writes](#) about a private meeting between Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and a (suspiciously white) group of business leaders in Beloit Wisconsin in which Kleefisch asked the group what the Walker administration could do for the group. [FreakOutNation looks](#) at State Senator Glenn Grothman's (R-Bend) proposal to end the five day work week. Grothman says the proposal is about freedom (some workers want to work more), but the Economic Policy Institute has said it could result in employers forcing workers to work more overtime. Still in Wisconsin, [The Prairie Badger draws](#) comparisons between Governor Scott Walker and Chris Christie, writing that Walker can also be vindictive in his politics, as evidenced by his pulling of a student regent position at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville in 2013. The reason? Walker found out the student had signed a petition calling for the Governor's recall.

After a large snowstorm in Michigan, [Eclectablog created](#) a meme about "socialist snowplows" parodying the Tea Party that was not well received by many libertarians and other conservatives, who did not see the comparison the Michigan government's inability to fund road and bridge repair and snow removal services.

West and Pacific

[WyoFile reports](#) that Liz Cheney's withdrawal from the Republican primary race for one of Wyoming's U.S. Senate

seats—apparently due to health issues in her family—shows the failure of the Cheney family to create a political dynasty like the Bushes or Kennedys. *National Journal* [says](#) that Cheney's failed Senate race shows a larger rejection of the politics of the Bush-Cheney administration, particularly their hawkish foreign policy.

After a December 20th ruling that legalized same-sex marriage in Utah, *Crooks and Liars* [writes](#) that the Supreme Court has put a hold on same-sex marriages until the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals can examine the ruling that resulted in the marriage of 900 gay and lesbian couples in the state.

In Colorado, *Hit & Run* [looks at](#) a brewing class-action lawsuit resulting from the Department of Corrections failing to correctly account for time off for good behavior when setting the mandatory release date of its inmates. *The Spot* [reports](#) that two Colorado College political scientists have predicted that the 2014 elections will be good for Republicans and Democratic governor John Hickenlooper, who has faced so many challenges in his first term (including shootings, wildfires, flooding, secessionists, and marijuana legalization) that the election should seem easy in comparison. Meanwhile, *ColoradoPols* [says](#) that the state's legislature plans to be in session for longer than the U.S. Congress, and may actually do more work in four months than the national body will do in a full year.

Blog for Arizona [implores](#) everyone to stop fixating on Steven Seagal's comment that it might be fun to run for governor; since the actor does not meet the residency requirement to run for governor he will definitely not be a contender in the upcoming election.

Blue Oregon [investigates](#) when Oregon's growing population will give it a sixth Congressional seat, predicting the magic year will be 2020, although some projections claim it could be as late as 2040.



Troubles for high speed rail in California? Credit: J. Stephen Conn (Creative Commons BY NC)

Moving to California, *Capitol Alert* [tallies](#) the impress fundraising efforts of Governor Jerry Brown, who collected \$1.7 million in donations during the last week of 2013, bringing his campaign war chest to nearly \$17 million, even though he has not yet announced if he will seek re-election. However, *The American Interest* [reports](#) that Governor Brown may face problems this election year due to difficulties with his high-speed rail plan after two court decisions held up construction for environmental reasons and made it harder for the state to raise money for the project. *Fox & Hounds* [opines](#) that the rail must be stopped as its final cost estimate is now \$68.4 billion and if it was constructed its operation would have to be heavily subsidized to make the ticket prices competitive.

Staying in California, *Capitol Alert* [covers](#) the Democrats' plan to [create](#) a universal pre-kindergarten program with the state's expected budget surplus. *Capitol Alert* also [reports](#) that in light of published evidence that Democratic

State Senator Ron Calderon took bribes, the senator has lost committee assignments, campaign donors, and been assigned to a lonely desk in the corner of the Senate chambers. Finally, *FlashReport* [writes](#) that while Republicans have not performed well in California lately, the Democrats' (who currently control the governor's office and the Legislature) failures on a number of key issues, such as the economy, healthcare, water, and the budget, have created opportunities for Republicans to make gains in 2014.

Last, but not least, *The American Prospect* [responds](#) conservative criticisms that a universal basic income (UBI) program is communist arguing that the Alaska Permanent Fund essentially provides a UBI to its residents. Far from being a communist haven, Alaska is Republican-controlled and the UBI seems to work well; the state has a 10% poverty rate and the second lowest level of income inequality in the country.

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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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