

Congress strikes \$1 trillion budget deal, Democrats clear the field for Hillary Clinton and will Puerto Rico default? – US national blog round up for 11 – 17 January

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.

The Democratic Party and Obama, the GOP and 'Bridgegate'

This week saw speculation about the Democrats possible fortunes in this year's mid-term and the 2016 presidential elections. On Tuesday, *Crooks & Liars* looks at recently elected Senator for New Jersey, Cory Booker, [writing](#) that it is very unlikely that he will ever be President because of his leanings towards war with Iran. Meanwhile, *The Lonely Conservative* [looks](#) at the latest wave of Democratic retirements from the House of Representatives. The latest is Rep. Jim Moran (D-VA), who is retiring after twelve terms in the House. Looking ahead to 2016, *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that the fact that California Governor Jerry Brown and Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) have both ruled out running for the presidency shows that the Democratic Party has decided to clear the field for Hillary Clinton's likely run.

Last week, the memoirs of former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, caused a stir in Washington DC, with its criticism of President Obama's military policies. While some have said that Gates was wrong to criticise a sitting President, *The Atlantic* [disagrees](#), writing that Gates owes no loyalty to Obama, as the revealing of these sorts of criticisms are in the public's interest. Meanwhile, *The American Prospect* [says](#) that both of Obama's terms have lacked any real scandals of 'serious malfeasance', much to the chagrin of Republicans. Despite lacking real scandals since 2008, Obama's approval rating has dropped to around 42 percent. *Sabato's Crystal Ball* looks at whether or not the President has an [approval 'floor'](#) of around 40 percent or so.



Hilary Clinton on the campaign trail in 2008 Credit: Domino_Photography (Creative Commons BY NC ND)

Turning to the Republican Party, on Tuesday, *United Liberty* [looks](#) at why the GOP needs to remake its image away from being the 'party of the rich', to one which recognizes that people have to deal with poverty and joblessness, and offering solutions to those problems. Meanwhile, *Daily Kos* [says](#) that Republicans have figured out how to maintain their majority in the House at the mid-term elections this year – by criticising President Obama's record on the economy and jobs.

Many national level commentators have more to say on the 'Bridgegate' scandal that engulfed New Jersey Governor Chris Christie last week. On Saturday, *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) that the affair has a lot in common with Richard Nixon's Watergate – both occurred after in the run up to elections where they won by large margins, and those involved remained silent about their actions until after the elections. On Sunday, *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that Christie will be facing impeachment if it turns out that he knew about the closures of the George Washington

Bridge in September, which would completely eliminate his potential as a candidate in the 2016 presidential election. On Monday, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that 'Bridgegate' is a disaster for the GOP as well as Christie, because he may have been their best hope to mount a challenge to Hillary Clinton in 2016. Meanwhile, *The Monkey Cage* [takes a close look](#) at whether or not the Republican Party is (as many have said) averse to a centre-right candidate, like Chris Christie, for the Presidency.

Government and the Beltway

On Monday, *National Journal* [looks](#) at how lobbyists are making a comeback in politics, writing that many former lobbyists have become candidates in important campaigns. Meanwhile, *Roll Call's Rothenblog* has a look at the 'dangerous dozen' open House seat races in this year's mid-term elections, saying that while two are very likely to flip from Democrat to Republican, the remainder are anyone's guess.

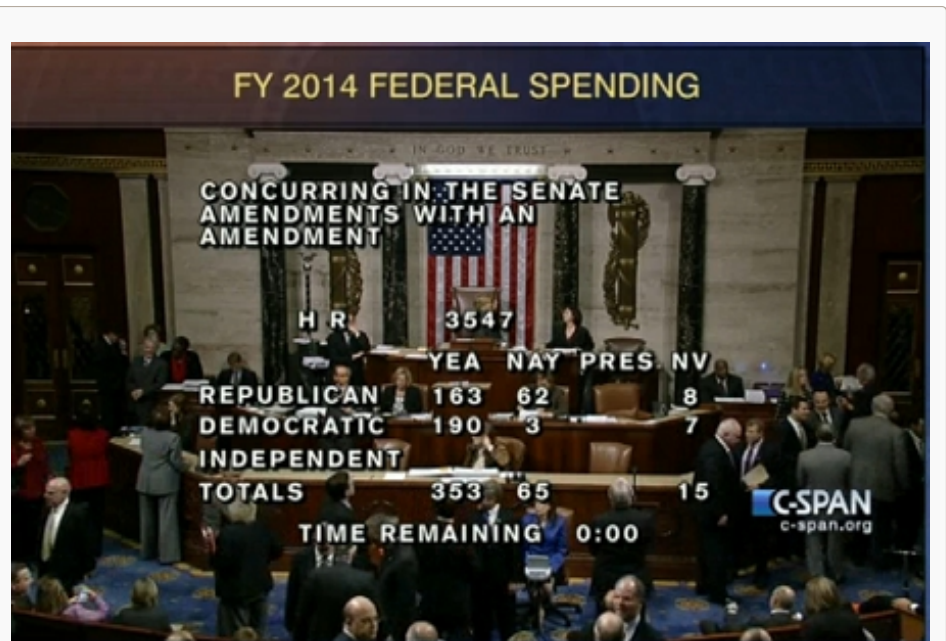
The Hill's Congress blog [calls](#) for full equality for the 3.6 million U.S. citizens who live in Puerto Rico, rejecting any alternatives, such as an 'enhanced Commonwealth'. Looking at another area that has called for representation in Congress, *National Journal* [writes](#) this week that the incumbent mayor of Washington D.C., Vincent Gray currently leads the Democratic field in the mayoral election. This is despite a major campaign finance scandal in 2010.

Crooks & Liars [covers](#) new research that has found that 50 percent of Congress are millionaires, something that is echoed in *The Atlantic's* [coverage](#) of comments from House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi this week, that the amount of money in contemporary politics is keeping women out of office.

Congress' agenda

On Monday, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that despite doing so under President Bush, Republicans in Congress have no plans to vote to extend unemployment benefits which ended late last year. They say that, despite their opposition and claims that they will be offering an alternative, the GOP has no plan to deal with unemployment. By Tuesday, *Daily Kos* reports that Senate Republicans have indeed [blocked](#) two bills that would have extended unemployment benefits.

The main news to come out of Congress this week is the approval of a \$1 trillion budget deal by the House. After a three day extension to the budget on Tuesday, as [reported](#) by *Crooks & Liars*, the budget is passed by the House and Senate on Wednesday and Thursday, [says](#) *Daily Kos*. In the lead up to the budget's passing, *The Foundry* [says](#) that it is now time to figure out what is actually in the 1,582 page omnibus Bill. On Wednesday, *United Liberty* reassures conservatives by [saying](#) that Congress is not cutting military pension benefits as part of the budget deal. The only thing they say is changing is that the rate of growth for these pensions is being reduced.



The House passes the omnibus spending bill Credit: C-Span

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [warns](#) that Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) is running out of time to get the 60 votes needed for her bill to that changes the way military sexual assaults are dealt with to pass. They say that her bid may be stalling as some Senators move to support a less controversial measure, while others may simply feel that it will not be voted on for some time to come.

With the government's budget now agreed, eliminating the threat of a government shutdown for at least this year, eyes are likely to turn to the debt ceiling, which will be reached again sometime after February. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Tuesday that Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), who led the GOP's fight against a budget deal and raising the debt ceiling last year, will be disappointed at his party's seeming decision not to again tie raising the debt ceiling to the repeal of the President's Affordable Care health program.

Finally, despite making some progress this week, it seems that [everyone still hates Congress](#), according to *Daily Kos*.

Affordable Care

On Monday, *American Thinker* [looks](#) at some of the problems of Obamacare's new Spanish language website, such as links to forms in English and poor translations caused by a computer program being used to translate text. Meanwhile, *Wonkblog* [says](#) that while fewer younger people have signed up for Obamacare than are needed by the law to keep premiums low, this is likely to have changed by early April, and there is no risk of a 'death spiral' for the program as many had predicted. On Wednesday, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that the latest legal challenge against Obamacare has been thrown out by a Court Judge in Washington D.C. The challenge would have removed tax credits for premiums, based on one part of the Affordable Care Act statute that had been taken out of context. Finally, on Thursday, *The Lonely Conservative* [wonders](#) if the GOP has given up on trying repealing Obamacare after various Republican leaders and groups have said that the focus is now on fixing the law.

Foreign policy and defense

The U.S. is currently in the middle of trade negotiations with Europe and the Pacific. Looking at these negotiations, *The Feed* [says](#) that President Obama's biggest obstacles in getting the deals through may be his own allies in the Democratic Party. Many Senators and Congressmen have had negative reactions to the deals being fast-tracked through Congress.

On Tuesday, *American Thinker* [criticises](#) Obama's recent statement that he would like to 'give peace a chance' in reference to dealings with Iran. They say that the path to peace is through strength, not disarmament as many on the left would advocate.

Looking again at revelations of the National Security Agency's spying, *The Atlantic* [ponders](#) whether or not America owes foreigners any privacy, saying that while the Agency should not be spying on Americans, foreigners are not protected by the U.S. Constitution.

The economy and society

On Friday, *Red State* [looks](#) at the December 2013 jobs report, which showed the real number of new private sector jobs to be below previous estimates. They look at two possible explanations: that the workforce is shrinking, and that the terrible weather in December led to fewer new jobs being created. *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at workers as well, writing that a new report has found that temporary workers face a higher risk of death and injury compared to directly employed workers.

This month is the 50th anniversary of the 'War on Poverty' initiated by President Lyndon Johnson. *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that conservatives sabotaged the 'war' in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan and subsequent massive cuts to anti-poverty and educational programs. Meanwhile, *The Foundry* reports that the U.S. is now ranked 12th in the world in terms of economic freedom, down from 6th in 2008. They [say](#) that increases in the size and scope of government have helped to erode economic freedom in the country.

Wonkblog [looks](#) back to the housing bubble of the mid-2000s, writing that the bubble itself and the subsequent crash, were more pronounced in Hispanic communities than for those communities that had a majority of blacks, whites, or Asians.

The American Interest [says](#) that there is an increasing possibility that the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico may be on the verge of defaulting on its debt, with a per capita debt to income ratio of 83 percent.

And finally...

The Lonely Conservative [wonders](#) if new mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio would have been elected if he had been seen eating pizza with a fork, as he was spotted doing this week.

Roll Call's Heard on the Hill reports on the latest activities of the [Capitol Hill fox](#), including sunbathing and catching a squirrel. They also link to a [map](#) of sightings across D.C.

Finally, an author at *The Atlantic* [had his lunch interrupted by a visit from President Obama](#), and reports what happens when the President sits down next to you at a café.

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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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