

Ted Cruz has no regrets, a diplomatic spat with India, and fewer Republicans believe in evolution – US national blog round up for 28 December – 3 January 2014

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 2014 drew to a close, commentators on the left, like *Wonkblog* [hailed](#) what they termed the ‘December deluge’ for private health insurance enrolments through the Affordable Care website, Healthcare.gov. They write that more than 1.1 million people have signed up so far, with the vast majority in December. *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that President Obama’s approval rating has jumped by five points to 44 percent, reflecting that Obamacare is working, with 6 million now covered thanks to the program. *American Thinker* is not nearly so positive, [writing](#) that the administration’s target of having 7 million enrollees by the end of March now looks to be unachievable. *The Feed* is also [critical](#) of Obamacare saying that while two million signed up in state and federal exchanges prior to the December 24th deadline, many people’s new plans are actually more restrictive than their old ones. Meanwhile *Daily Kos* takes a quick [look](#) at what would happen if Obamacare were to be repealed – many would no longer be able to afford the medicines they need.

Despite Obamacare’s successes in enrollment numbers, some are still critical of its website, Healthcare.gov. On Sunday, *American Thinker* [writes](#) that there have been difficulties in transferring applications from the federal computer system to the state systems, meaning that some may not have coverage if they need to see a doctor soon. On a similar vein, *Hit & Run* [says](#) that even with improvements to the Obamacare website, the user experience of those who do not have insurance is still negative – with 59 percent reporting negative or very negative experiences.

Government and the Beltway

On Sunday, *Outside the Beltway* has an end of year summary of Senator Ted Cruz’s (R-TX) strategy to defund the government in September and October, which helped to lead to the government’s shutdown. They [say](#) that Cruz has stated this week that he has no regrets over his role in the shutdown, instead blaming Democratic leaders. Meanwhile, *The Democratic Truth* [looks](#) at why the Tea Party (as exemplified by Cruz) can’t govern – mostly because their brand of conservatism belongs in the 1970s. Still on the Republican Party, *Hit & Run* [examines](#) the ideological differences between the different factions within the GOP, saying that while some have commented that libertarians within the party



Ted Cruz Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

may not be able to work well with conservative Christians, they may well be allies in protecting the civil liberties of the religious.

On Sunday, *PoliticusUSA* [looks](#) at who were the winners in the US Senate have been, in what they call a 'year full of disappointment'. Popular picks include Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand. Meanwhile, *The Foundry* [has](#) its top ten picks of government waste in 2013, including \$1 million for a bus stop with a heated pavement in Washington, \$5.4 million for alcohol and glasses for the State Department, and \$1 million for a granite sculpture for the US embassy in London. [According](#) to *Red State*, government spending is set to continue in 2014, with discretionary spending increasing from \$967 billion to \$1.012 trillion. They criticise the Republican Party for not insisting that spending bills are passed in a regular order in 2014, rather than in one large bill planned for next week when Congress returns from the holidays.

This week was also a time for reflection about President Obama after the first year of his second term. [According](#) to *PoliticusUSA* Obama is the most admired man in the world for Americans for the 6th year in a row. They say that 'has to hurt' for Republicans who have been constantly criticising him over Obamacare and Benghazi. On the right, *United Liberty* [looks](#) at Obama's top constitutional violations of the year, five of which have involved Obamacare.

Foreign policy and defense

On Saturday, *American Thinker* [reports](#) that a federal judge has ruled that the surveillance program of the National Security Agency (NSA) does not violate Americans' privacy rights, which goes against an earlier decision by another judge that questioned the program's constitutionality. The issue may now head to the Supreme Court.

In 2013 there was a great deal of commentary and controversy over the September 2012 attack on the American diplomatic mission on Benghazi, Libya, and the role of the terrorist group, Al Qaeda. *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) on a New York Times investigation which questions Al Qaeda's involvement and instead maintains the attack was spontaneous. *Crooks & Liars* [says](#) that Representative Darrell Issa (R-CA) has 'doubled down' on his previous claims that the government covered up Al Qaeda's involvement in the Benghazi attack.

On Monday, *Occasional Planet* [looks](#) at Obama's foreign policy accomplishments as President since 2008, saying that he has successfully made the shift to 'softer' power, preferring to use diplomacy rather than hard military force

The Feed [looks](#) at the little-reported dispute between the U.S. and India over the arrest of an Indian diplomat in New York, saying that India has revoked the privileges of some U.S. diplomats in India. They argue for a mutually face-saving compromise and for a better understanding of the understanding of the status of diplomats and officials between the two countries.

The economy and society

For many commentators, there is hope that 2014 will see the beginnings of sustained economic recovery in the U.S. and elsewhere. This is especially important in light of one of *Wonkblog's* [graphs of the year](#) –

one that shows for many households, there has been no economic recovery at all so far. The economy is



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especially bad for the unemployed, as illustrated by *Crooks & Lawyers'* [coverage](#) of a woman in Los Angeles who was forced to sell her car, which she needs to find work, in order to stay afloat. On Saturday, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that for 1.3 million people, emergency unemployment insurance has expired, because Congress has failed to renew the safety net. This is at a time when long-term unemployment is double the level it was when benefits expired after past recessions.

It is not all doom and gloom for workers, though. [According](#) to *PoliticusUSA* from January 1st, the minimum wage in thirteen states will rise, giving low wage workers an automatic pay rise. Still on the economy, *The Foundry* [takes](#) President Obama to task on some of his recent comments on economic growth and social mobility, saying that the American economy is actually much fairer and more open than it was in the decades after World War II.

Recent weeks have seen a great deal of controversy over anti-gay comments made by Phil Robertson, one of the stars of the A&E reality show, 'Duck Dynasty'. Robertson was suspended from the show in mid-December over the comments, but was reinstated this week, much to the [dismay](#) of *PoliticusUSA*. On similar lines, *Daily Kos* [says](#) that an 'outcry in support of bigotry' from many, including Sarah Palin and Governor Bobby Jindal of Louisiana, led to A&E's reinstatement of Robertson and the show. *American Thinker* takes the side of the A&E network, [saying](#) that there was no way that it would 'emasculate' its most popular show by removing Robertson, especially when the people protesting 'don't watch the show anyway'.

On Saturday, *Doug Ross* [writes](#) about what they call 'backdoor gun control' – the Environmental Protection Agency's new regulation for lead-free ammunition, which is 'stifling' domestic production. *Hit & Run* [looks](#) at the 'internal checkpoints' of America's Border Patrol – stop and search points many miles from the Mexican border where travellers are asked to provide proof of citizenship.

Looking back, *Outside the Beltway* writes that 2013 was the year that [marriage equality won](#), saying that 18 states, plus the District of Columbia (39% of the U.S. population), have now legalised same-sex marriage.

On Tuesday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at a new poll that says that Republican belief in evolution has declined by 10 points, to 43 percent, since 2009. They say that it's possible that many of those who said they believed in evolution in 2009 now no longer consider themselves to be Republicans. *Informed Comment* [thinks](#) that this trend may reflect that the GOP is getting older, and that many young people are deserting it, as they increasingly identify with Democratic values.

And finally...

FreakOutNation [rounds up](#) the right-wing 'hysteria' over President Obama's church non-attendance on Christmas Day.



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Outside the Beltway [looks](#) at recent research that tries to correlate people's favourite alcoholic drinks with their politics. Democrats tend to drink vodka; Republicans, bourbon and whiskey.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USApp– American Politics and Policy, nor

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