

Trump comes up again, the GOP's Independent problem and debt limit on the horizon – US national blog round up for 18 – 24 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 the GOP

Many states have pushed for the legalization of marijuana sales, especially after legalization in Colorado earlier this year. On Sunday, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that President Obama has weighed in on the debate, saying that while he considers it to be no more dangerous than drinking alcohol, he feels that more widespread legalization would be a 'bad idea'. Meanwhile, *The Lonely Conservative* examines Obama's recent promises that 2014 will be a [year of action](#). They say that there is little behind his claims that he will be able to create jobs and opportunities whilst Congress remains gridlocked. On Monday, *PoliticusUSA* [argues](#) that the media needs to talk less about Obama's claims of what he can do, and instead focus on Congress' lack of action.

Turning to the Republican Party, on Monday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at comments from a South Carolina Republican candidate for the Senate that schoolteachers should be legally allowed to carry any machine gun they wish, to protect school grounds. Last week Congress approved a spending bill to avert another government shutdown. The *National Journal* [says](#) that while the GOP won some concessions on the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), which had been central to their opposition last year, it could still create problems for Republicans who face primary challenges later this year. Meanwhile, *Daily Kos* writes on the Republican Party's recent attempts at 'rebranding' itself as more moderate, saying that despite these efforts, the party's base still demands more and more extremist candidates. On Thursday, *The American Prospect* [looks](#) at another problem Republicans have – Independent voters. They argue that Independents are closer in their moral beliefs to Democrats than to the GOP, which is a problem when much of their rhetoric is unpersuasive or even offensive.

Republican New Jersey Governor Chris Christie did not escape the spotlight this week, with continuing comment and discussion over his 'Bridgewater' scandal, especially in light of his potential Presidential run in 2016. On Tuesday, *No More Mister Nice Blog* [looks at a new poll on Christie](#), writing that while his unfavourable numbers have risen, the people who used to like him, Republicans and Independents, still do. Not everyone is so upbeat about Christie, however. *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that Republicans are 'in panic' as the likely Democratic candidate for 2016, Hillary Clinton, now has an 8-point lead over Christie in Presidential polling. Still on 2016, *The Monkey Cage* [finds](#) that the Democratic Party may face an uphill battle to keep the White House, with the GOP having a 64 percent chance of winning the Presidency. On



Donald Trump

Wednesday, *United Liberty* [says](#) that billionaire Donald Trump has hinted this week that he may well make a bid for the Republican Presidential nomination in 2016. They say that it is unlikely that Trump is serious – but if he is, that Republicans should ‘run for cover’. Finally, *National Journal* [looks](#) at Republican plans to compress the 2016 presidential primary calendar, saying that while it has advantages, it also risks limiting the amount of free media coverage the party gets from national televised debates.

Government and the Beltway

On Monday, *The Foundry* [looks](#) at ‘overcriminalization’ in the U.S. They argue that with 40,000 new federal, state, and local laws coming into effect this year, many people will now break a law without even realizing it.

On Thursday, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at the Hispanic vote in Presidential elections. They say that votes from this group for Republicans and Democrats have fluctuated since 1980, proving that there may well be things that the GOP can do to attract Hispanic voters.

Daily Kos [looks](#) at Congressional death benefits for the spouses of lawmakers who die in office. They say that the while the benefits are not a large amount of money in national terms, it is a benefit that Congress has granted to itself, and not to other federal employees.

Congress’ agenda

One of last year’s major debates was over voters’ rights, especially in the wake of the Supreme Court’s decision to quash parts of the Voting Rights Act. *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor’s recent calls for Congress to fix the Act, saying that now there is a bipartisan voting rights bill before Congress, he should make a decision on whether or not to support it.

On Monday, *Crooks & Liars* [looks](#) at a ‘useful’ bill introduced by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), which would make the details of government’s settlements with banks and other corporations public.

Last October saw Congress deadlocked over the budget and the debt ceiling. While the budget has now been agreed on, the threat of the country reaching its debt ceiling looms once again. On Wednesday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the Treasury Secretary, Jack Lew, has warned that Congress must agree on raising the debt limit by the end of February. They say that given that the GOP backed down last year on the budget and debt limit, there is far less chance of deadlock this time around.

Affordable Care

On Monday, *United Liberty* [says](#) that although President Obama’s signature healthcare reform, the Affordable Care Act, was passed under the ‘pretense’ of expanding healthcare coverage to those who had previously been uninsured, 2/3 of the 6 million people who have signed up under Obamacare had previously been covered under their own employer-based health plans. *Wonkblog* takes a close [look](#) at the rate of uninsurance, writing that while the number of Americans who reported not having health coverage has fallen in January, this is actually difficult to attribute to Obamacare, as the rate had been trending downwards throughout 2013.



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The Lonely Conservative [reports](#) on Thursday that the ratings agency, Moody's, has this week downgraded health insurers from 'stable' to 'negative', because the implementation of Obamacare is presenting a great challenge to their credit profile. *American Thinker* [reports](#) that the Target company has announced that it is ending its coverage for part-time workers, thereby dumping the administrative costs onto the taxpayer. They wonder how many more companies will follow suit.

Meanwhile, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that Republicans have admitted defeat on the Affordable Care Act by approving the \$1 trillion omnibus spending bill last week, and that while they are still saying that they will kill the program, this now will not happen as they will continue to approve budgets that fund it, fearing the political fallout of another shutdown.

Foreign policy and defense

Recent months have seen much progress in diplomatic efforts between Iran and the U.S. and Europe. *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at Congress' new push to impose new sanctions on Iran, at the same time as other countries are discussing rolling existing ones back. They say that diplomacy is working, and that efforts to scuttle it are nothing less than fomenting war. *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that after the Iraq 'debacle', foreign policy is a losing issue for the Republican Party, and that they should ignore calls from former ambassador to the UN, John Bolton for it to be a prominent part of politics in the lead up to this year's mid-term elections. Meanwhile, *The American Interest* [says](#) that Obama does not have a strategic theory in his approach to the Middle East, and that America's current engagement there is mostly for show, with little chance of change in its relationship with Iran.

On Wednesday, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) on comments from Senator John McCain that Obama's lack of willingness to intervene militarily in Syria's civil war shows that he is 'worse than [Jimmy] Carter'. On similar lines, but elsewhere, *American Thinker* [says](#) that Obama is betraying the forces of democracy in the Ukraine by not supporting the country's pro-Western demonstrators. Meanwhile, *The Hill's Congress Blog* [writes](#) that despite concerns about America's global leadership, the U.S. is not weak. They say of its main rivals Russia and China that Russia is 'withering on the vine' and that China is confronting serious challenges such as environmental problems and an aging population.

In the wake of President Obama's speech last week on the role of the National Security Agency (NSA), *Informed Comment* writes that the Agency's surveillance program is about [control and leverage](#), rather than security. On Monday, the *American Thinker* [writes](#) that it's premature for Obama to be outlining NSA reforms when there's still uncertainty about the extent of the agency's surveillance.

The economy and society

Income inequality in America has recently come into focus with an important speech on the subject from President Obama in December, and widespread concern about the relative failure of the 'War on Poverty' which turned 50 this month. *Wonkblog* takes on the topic of how to help the middle class. Their advice? Don't [lower](#) corporate taxes. On Thursday, *The Lonely Conservative* [looks](#) at a recent poll that finds that the majority of Americans are concerned about income inequality.

On Tuesday the *National Journal* [looks](#) at why fewer people are looking for jobs in the U.S. They write that the labour force participation rate has dropped from 66 to 62.8 percent since 2008. They say that many laid-off workers can't find jobs, and young people are staying in college to cope with the retrenched labor market. Still on workers, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at a case before the Supreme Court that would hold that public employee unions are unconstitutional.

This week marked the 41st anniversary of the landmark abortion case, *Roe V. Wade*. *National Journal* [says](#) that it is very difficult for Democrats to roll back the large number of abortion limits passed at a state level since 2010. Despite this, the issue is likely to be very important in this year's mid-term Congressional and gubernatorial elections. Meanwhile, *Crooks & Liars* [covers](#) an anti-abortion rally in Washington DC on Wednesday, where thousands of protesters, spurred on by comments from the Pope, called for the end of abortion in the U.S.

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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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