

A Cromnibus for Christmas, the Senate's CIA report, and a 'broken windows' policy for the police: US national blog round up for 6 – 12 December

USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson looks at the best in political blogging from around the Beltway. Our round-up of state blogs will follow on Saturday afternoon.

This week was a busy one for U.S. politics, both with the release of the executive summary of a controversial report on the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) interrogation techniques in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, and budget negotiations continuing to the 11th hour on Thursday in Congress.

President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Sunday, *The Daily Signal* says that if readers think that President Obama's unilateral executive action in November was an abuse of power, then his administration's new rules for the Environmental Protection Agency are even worse. They [write](#) that the new regulations, which would aim to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 30 percent, could cost energy customers an extra \$173 billion by 2020. They say that the regulations will also expand federal control over electric power, despite being unlikely to make any difference to climate change.

Since Obama's took action on immigration last month, many in the Republican Party have been pushing to 'punish' the president by defunding the Department of Homeland Security (which would carry out the action) in any budget deal that would prevent the government from shutting down on Thursday night. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that as the budget deadline approached, the tabled budget bill (worth more than \$1 trillion), funds all agencies until September 2015, and Homeland Security until the end of February. They say that even after funding runs out at that point, the majority of Homeland Security employees may continue to work as they would be deemed essential to national security or public safety. *PoliticoUSA* [characterizes](#) the budget agreement as a victory for Obama, with the threat of a shutdown now off the table for most of 2015.



On Tuesday, prior to the release of the Senate's report on CIA interrogation practices, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that Obama has a 'lose-lose' choice on the document. They say that if the President is torn between repudiating the report's release and embracing it, risking charges of hypocrisy after seeking to delay its release. After the report is released, *The Federalist* [writes](#) that the Senate Intelligence Committee's findings are about politics – not justice. They say that it is beyond credulity that the CIA's interrogation program never bore any worthwhile results.

Looking at the Democratic Party more generally, *The American Prospect* [wonders](#), in the wake of Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu's election loss over the weekend, if Democrats can win in the South by being more liberal. They say that even if Democrats will inevitably lose in states like South Carolina, it is still better for them to do so by sticking to their principles, rather than distancing themselves from their own party.

Moving to the Republican side, on Sunday, *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at what the GOP can do to fight back against

Obama's immigration action. They say that Congressional Republicans should only pass a short-term bill that funds the government, and does not allow funding for the order's implementation until January, when the party takes control of the Senate as well.

The National Journal [writes](#) this week on the new 'Facebook army' that polices the GOP. They say that the conservative 'ForAmerica' group has amassed a 7-million strong group on the social networking site that is gearing up to hold the Republican Party's 2016 candidates to conservative principles. On Monday, *American Thinker* [looks](#) at what the party should do with what they say is its 'populist moment', after their wave election in the recent midterms. They say that the party's Congressional leaders are likely to miss their opportunities to fight Obama's executive action and Obamacare, as well as corporate tax reform. Meanwhile, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at what a Supreme Court decision striking down the remaining states' bans on same-sex marriage would mean for the party. They say that it would be an effective end to the debate, and that Republicans are unlikely to respond given their recent silence when state bans have been overturned.

Elections and the road to 2016

On the Democratic side this week, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the party has a built in advantage for the Electoral College, due its winner take all format, and the fact that larger, more urban states tend to lean Democratic. They say that, despite this advantage, looking ahead to 2016, it would only take a slight 'red-tinted headwind' to remove the party's lead and win the White House for the GOP.

On Sunday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that in order to win in 2016, the Democratic favorite, former Senator and Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, will need to win over the types of black voters that Mary Landrieu could not in Louisiana. They [say](#) that her candidacy is unlikely to generate the same level of enthusiasm among black voters as Obama's did in 2008 and 2012. On Tuesday, *United Liberty* [wonders](#) whether or not a populist presidential bid from Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren might be able to steal the nomination from Clinton. They say left wing groups have 'flirted' with idea of a Warren candidacy as they become uneasy about Clinton's 'baggage'. *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) on a leftish bid to draft Warren this week. They say that Senator Warren has rejected the efforts of Moveon.org aimed to convince her to vote, including a \$1 million launch phase.

Daily Kos [writes](#) this week on the potential for Independent Senator, Bernie Sanders of Vermont, to run for the presidency in 2016. They write that Sanders' progressive economic agenda is on the side of Americans with little or no power and wealth, and even if he has no chance of getting the nomination, his message would be good for the Democrats and the nation as a whole.

On Tuesday, *National Journal* looks at another Democrat who may be looking towards a Presidential bid in 2016 – the outgoing Governor of Maryland, Martin O'Malley. They [say](#) that O'Malley's moves, including a recent spate of 'selfies', show that he is considering at least a vice-presidential run or is aiming for a high profile Cabinet position.



Hillary Clinton Credit: Brent Danley (Creative Commons: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Moving on to speculation over the 2016 Republican presidential field, *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) this week that former

President George W. Bush has recently stated in an interview, that his brother, Jeb, can beat Hillary Clinton in an election contest. For many, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul is the GOP front-runner for the nomination. *Outside the Beltway* [takes issue](#) with this, writing this week that while he has proven himself to be politically adept, he is likely to have some significant opponents from within the party, especially on national security issues. On Monday, *National Review's The Campaign Spot* reports that the latest Republican candidate is, surprisingly, Tennessee Governor, Bill Haslam. They [say](#) that with 70 percent approval ratings in his state and high approval ratings from Democrats as well, some feel that he should be a contender. They warn that given the already crowded GOP field, someone like Haslam, who has a 'nice guy' image, might struggle to stand out.

Crooks & Liars writes this week on conservative donors' fears that the wide Republican field may lead to a bloody primary that will hurt the eventual nominee. They [report](#) that leading donors have begun discussing how to clear the field to make way for a single establishment candidate that will be able to take on Hillary Clinton in 2016. *Red State* also looks at the wide candidate field, and writes that unlike in 2007, the candidates 'don't all suck'. They [say](#) that the 2016 election is likely to see the deepest, most experienced bench of GOP candidates since 1980.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Monday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that the Obama administration now has more than 1,000 investigators who are targeting businesses for failing to pay the minimum wage. They say that this number is up from 730 at the start of the Obama administration.

The Hill's Congress blog calls this week for the Senate to confirm Dr Vivek Murthy as the 19th Surgeon General. They [say](#) that Murthy's appointment has been held up for political reasons, but that he is the kind of person who is needed to speak openly to the American people about health issues including smoking, obesity, violence and disease prevention. Staying on health issues, *The Atlantic* writes this week that Ron Klain, who was appointed to deal with the Ebola crisis in October, will be leaving his post early next year. They [say](#) that Klain's exit will likely be a quiet one, given that the public's attention has now moved away from the Ebola outbreak.

On Sunday, *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that the GOP won a further two House races over the weekend, giving them at least 246 seats when they return in January, the largest Republican majority since 1929.

On Senate issues this week, *Roll Call's Hawkings Here* looks at whether or not the Republican Party will reinstate the filibuster rule on appointments next year when they take over the chamber. They [say](#) that for the next two years it doesn't really matter if they chose to reinstate the filibuster or not, since controlling the majority means that they will also control the calendar.

The 'Cromnibus' budget

One of the biggest news stories this week was Congress' efforts to agree a budget deal before the government's funding ran out at midnight on Thursday. On Tuesday, *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that wrangling over inclusions to the Omnibus/Continuing Resolution (known as the 'Cromnibus') bill was continuing, with more than 90 policy riders being debated. By Wednesday, Congress had reached a deal on the budget, worth \$1.01 trillion, [reports](#) *Outside the Beltway*, one that would see GOP action on Obama's executive order on immigration delayed until January. *The Atlantic* [points out](#) that Congress has only 48 hours from Wednesday for the bill to be passed, and in that time it must review 1,600 pages. For those reading the Cromnibus, *The Daily Signal* has [7 tips on how to decipher](#) it, including reading the bill backwards to find the 'additional provisions'. *Hit & Run*, meanwhile seems to have read most of the bill, and gives a good list of the [highlights and lowlights](#), including cuts to the budgets of the EPA and the Internal Revenue Service, and an additional \$64 billion in overseas contingency funding for the military.

The Cromnibus is not likely to be welcomed by residents of Washington D.C. *Wonkblog* [reports](#) that it contains provisions that effectively block making marijuana possession legal in the District, something that was voted in favor of by nearly 70 percent of D.C. voters in a recent ballot initiative. *The Atlantic* [writes](#) on Wednesday on one budget rider that increases the amount that individual donors can contribute to party committees. They say these limits will increase from just over \$97,000 to \$776,000; something that Democrats and election reformers say will be destructive and anti-democratic.

Daily Kos [looks](#) this week at whether or not Tea Party Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) will slow down the Cromnibus bill when it reaches the Senate in the next few days. They say Cruz has not been sounding conciliatory. On Thursday, *The Atlantic* [reports](#) that the House has passed the bill 219-206, with the House and Senate also to pass a two day extension to avert a shutdown, so that the Senate could debate the bill on Friday with a view to passing it.

The Senate's CIA Torture Report

On Tuesday, the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence released the executive summary of their longer report into the CIA's Detention and Interrogation programs that occurred after the 9/11 attacks. *Hit & Run* gives the [headlines](#) from the report, including that the CIA's used of enhanced interrogation techniques were not effective at acquiring intelligence, and that the interrogations were far more brutal than the CIA had represented to policymakers. *Talking Points Memo* [reports](#) meanwhile that the former Director of the CIA, John Brennan has continued to maintain that these enhanced interrogation techniques produced useful intelligence that helped to save lives. *The Brennan Centre for Justice* [writes](#) this week that the report shows that U.S. torture was a catastrophic intelligence failure on every level, given that it produced unreliable information, was a recruiting tool for terrorists, and fuelled anti-American sentiments across the world. On Wednesday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that outgoing Senator Mark Udall, (D-CO) has once again called for the resignation of CIA Director John Brennan, accusing him of lying about the efficacy of torture.



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The Hill's Congress Blog [provides](#) a good overview this week of what it took to make the Senate's report public, including a fierce battle between Committee Chair, Dianne Feinstein and the CIA over the Committee's investigation. *The Federalist*, meanwhile, [looks](#) at whether or not the report was worth it, writing that recounting the 'dirty details' does not serve the public interest, given that the CIA's practices were already widely known.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Wednesday, the *Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at whether the Senate's report into the CIA's interrogation practices has opened up the U.S. to prosecution in the International Criminal Court. They say that the U.S. is not a member of the ICC, meaning that it has no right to investigate alleged war crimes committed by its citizens, and that it is unlikely to pick a fight with Washington that it is unable to win.

On Saturday, *Hit & Run* [gives](#) three reasons why Conservatives should fight for cuts in defense spending, ahead of the appointment of Ashton Carter, as the new Secretary of the Defense. These include the end of the war in Iraq the large number of U.S. allies, and the Republicans' legacy of attacking the military-industrial complex. *The Federalist* echoes these points, looking at new book by *The Wall Street Journal's* Bret Stephens, 'America in Retreat'. They [write](#) that while Stephens advocates a 'broken windows' approach to the way that America works in the world, they argue that the U.S. should only use force when its national interests or allies are threatened, not on a frequent or routine basis.

On Monday, *The Hill's Congress blog* writes that after a year of talks with Iran, the West has little to show for it. They [say](#) that the current stalemate in negotiations over Iran's nuclear program is the due to the silence from the UN Permanent Security Council members (plus Germany) on Iran's past and its current human rights violations. *The Daily Signal*, meanwhile, [calls](#) for the Obama Administration to sanction Iran, rather than Israel, as it is reportedly considering over the Israeli government's continued settlement building.

Also on the subject of sanctions this week, *The American Interest* [writes](#) that Congress has approved sanctions on Venezuela over accusations of human rights abuses during a crackdown on protests against President Nicolás Maduro earlier this year.

Obamacare and health policy

This week, *The Daily Signal* looks at Obamacare's 'contracting bonanza', [writing](#) that business purchases from the Department of Human Services have doubled to \$21 billion in the last decade, and are expected to continue to rise. Meanwhile, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that MIT Professor Jonathan Gruber apologized for his controversial comments on the process that led to the passage of the Affordable Care Act in testimony to the House Oversight Committee this week. This coming Monday is the deadline for the enrolling in



Obamacare for 2015, writes *Daily Kos*. They [say](#) that ahead of the deadline, enrollments have surged, with nearly 1.4 million plans being sold via the Obamacare website, *Healthcare.gov*.

On Thursday, *The American Interest* [writes](#) that the expansion of Medicaid that went along with the Affordable Care Act is about to get very messy. They say that while the law provided a temporary payment increase for doctors, this will end at the start of 2015, with doctors having an average reimbursement cut of nearly 43 percent. With reimbursement rates being cuts, doctors are likely to be less willing to take on patients, meaning that they will not be able to use their insurance as originally intended.

The economy and society

On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) on the sobering fact that most Americans are supportive of the use of torture to gain information from terrorist subjects, even when it is called "torture". They write that surveys have shown that 71 percent of Americans accept torture under some circumstances.

This week, *Paul Krugman* [compared](#) the current recovery with that that occurred in 2001. Referring to them as 'postmodern' recoveries, in that they took place in business cycles characterised by monetary tightening, he argues that the Obama-era recovery has been stronger than that of the Bush era given that private employment has grown at a faster rate. Even if we are in a recovery that does not mean that life is great for all. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) on Wednesday that suburban life means very different things for whites and blacks. They say that minorities who have moved into once-white suburbia have found the same levels of isolation and inequality.

The Atlantic [looks](#) at the idea of applying 'broken windows' policy to the police. They say that by focusing on police officers who begin to show signs of disordered behavior, this may go some way to reducing police misconduct. Police accountability seems all the more important after reading *Hit & Run's* [report](#) that more than 1,000 people have been killed by police this year, according to a new website that tracks this data. Meanwhile, *The Federalist* [reports](#) that a new poll out this week shows that the popularity of gun rights is on the rise, with 52 percent of people believing that it is more important to protect gun rights than to control them.

And finally...

Outside the Beltway [writes](#) on Saturday that Mitt Romney's Presidential campaign in 2012 required tweets to be approved by 22 people, compared to four for the Obama campaign.

Wonkblog has a handy [map](#) that shows where your Christmas tree has come from – it's likely to be either Oregon or North Carolina.

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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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