

Obama's Cuba move, Jeb Bush looks to 2016, and a new Surgeon General: US national blog round up for 13 – 19 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.

President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Tuesday this week, *National Review's The Campaign Spot* [writes](#) that the 'bump' to President Obama's approval rating among Latino voters that has followed his executive action on immigration last month is overhyped. They write that while his support among Latinos has increased by 15 points since his action, the fact that they only make up 17 percent of the population means that the overall 'bump' is only 2.5 percent. Meanwhile, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) that a federal judge has ruled that Obama's executive action on immigration is unconstitutional, as it goes beyond 'prosecutorial discretion' and is a rigid framework for considering applications for deferred action on deportation.

On Thursday morning, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) on President Obama's announcement that the U.S. will seek to normalize relations with Cuba. The announcement comes after the U.S. and Cuba announced the release of political prisoners from both sides. *The Daily Signal* [responds](#) to Obama's announcement, writing that he does not have the authority to lift the embargo that has existed for more than 50 years. They say that only Congress has that responsibility, and that they should not allow the appointment of an Ambassador to Cuba to proceed unless there are changes in Cuba that allow freedom of expression and association.

While many are concerned that Obama is becoming an 'Imperial President' through his use of executive orders, *Hit & Run* writes this week that Obama's use of presidential 'memorandums' are also very important. They [say](#) that Obama has issued more memorandums than any other president, and is using them to take unilateral action. Obama's memorandums have included measures to give federal employees the day after Christmas off, and to declare the Bristol Bay, Alaska, area off limits to oil and gas exploration.

Moving to the Democratic Party more generally, this week, *RedState* [looks](#) at what they say is the Left's plan to retake state legislatures through "character assassination". They write that Liberal groups such as American Bridge are planning to use media trackers to catch Republican lawmakers out when they make racist or sexist statements, and then use this against them during the next election cycle.

The GOP's Tea Party wing has been an important political force for more than half a decade in America. *Political Animal* [wonders](#) why the left should not have its own version of the group, after Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren was called the 'Ted Cruz' (a Tea Party Senator from Texas) of the left, after she opposed the recent 'Cromnibus' budget. They say that the establishment centrists on both sides have failed the country, meaning that a new coalition in Washington is needed that will stand up for progressive ideas that have the support of the American people. On Tuesday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at Warren's recent role in the budget deal, determining that she is not the Ted Cruz of the left. They say that while Cruz's high profile crusades against Obamacare, immigration and gun control are all big issues for conservatives. Elizabeth Warren on the other hand wishes to dismantle the power of Wall Street – something that appeals to liberals and many conservatives alike.

While the Senate was eventually able to pass the \$1 trillion 'Cromnibus' bill this week, Texas Senator Ted Cruz had attempted to put a spanner in the works by scuttling a bipartisan agreement to push back votes to Monday, which forced the Senate to vote over the weekend, [reports Daily Kos](#). They say that Cruz's move got a 'chilly' reception from Republicans, as it gave the Democrats more time to get things done, such as confirming Obama's

nominees. On Monday, Ted Cruz hit back at his critics, [according](#) to *The Daily Signal*. They write that Cruz has accused many of his GOP colleagues as being complicit in Obama's agenda by not fighting harder against the President's executive action on immigration.

Elections and the road to 2016

Looking ahead to the 2016 elections, *Roll Call's At the Races* [writes](#) this week that the Democrats' losses in the House in the recent midterm elections have depleted their potential recruits for the next cycle's Senate races. They say that in some states that President Obama carried in 2012, such as Pennsylvania, the Democrats are down to a handful of House seats, meaning that the party may have to look to business and state government for candidates.

The big 2016 news that came out of this week was Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush's announcement that he is going to actively explore running for the Presidency. *National Journal* [reports](#) that he made the announcement via Facebook, and that he will create a leadership Political Action Committee to support his campaign in January. *The Daily Signal* is [downbeat](#) about Bush, saying that he no longer inspires conservatives, because of his relatively centrist views on immigration, and that he resembles failed Presidential candidates such as Bob Dole, John McCain and Mitt Romney in many respects. *The Federalist* is similarly [negative](#), presenting five reasons why Jeb Bush's presidential 'exploration' is not going anywhere. These reasons include his closeness to Wall Street, public exhaustion with dynastic politics, and the moment has passed for a 'managerial' conservative in the vein of his older brother, and President George W. Bush.



Jeb Bush Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

On Thursday, *American Thinker* [writes](#) that in order to win the Electoral College in 2016, the Republican Party needs a Hispanic on the ticket. They say that Nevada's Governor, Brian Sandoval is the GOP's best choice to help take Florida, Nevada and Colorado, three important states. *The Atlantic* [writes](#) this week on Senator Marco Rubio's (R-FL) conundrum over the Obama administration's shift in its Cuba policy. They say that given that more Americans support normalizing relations with Cuba, the heavy anti-Cuba rhetoric that he displayed this week may hurt his 2016 chances.

This week saw a great deal of focus on Elizabeth Warren, after her speech on Friday night after the Senate's passage of the 'Cromnibus'. In her speech, which *AmericaBlog* [says](#) "may make her President" Warren lambasted an addition to the spending bill which repeals part of the Dodd-Frank law as well as one which increases the donations allowed to political parties. Warren has consistently denied that she is running for President – despite this, *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that we should not expect the speculation that she is to end any time soon. They write that Warren always speaks in the present tense, e.g. "I am not running"; she needs to say that she *will* not run.

Even if Elizabeth Warren does seek the Democratic nomination in 2016, she faces some stiff competition in the form of former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. *PoliticoUSA* [reports](#) that Clinton leads Warren 48 to 6 percent in a new poll of Democrats. That said, even Clinton may now not have a clear path to the White House, now that

Jeb Bush is in the running, [writes](#) *The Atlantic* on Wednesday.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [states](#) that Elizabeth Warren is right in her comments that big banks were able to weaken a key regulation that would restrict Wall Street as part of the new government spending bill. They say that Robert Rubin, Bill Clinton's former Treasury Secretary moved to Citigroup after leaving government, with many of his protégés later following him there.

The spending bill passed late last week included a provision that blocks the Department of Justice from spending money to enforce a federal ban on the growing or selling of marijuana in the 23 states that have legalized it for medicinal use. *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that the fact that this measure was passed shows how far the debate over marijuana has shifted, with the drug's medical use now largely accepted, and general legalization the next step. Despite passing the 'Cromnibus' bill, *Daily Kos* still labels the 113rd the '[Worst. Congress. Ever.](#)' They write that its average approval rating was 14.5 percent in for 2013- 2014, and that it only passed 234 bills, down 18 percent since the 112th Congress.

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [reports](#) that the country has a new Surgeon General. They say that more than a year after being nominated, Vivek Murthy will take up the job after the Senate voted to confirm him. Republicans had been opposed to Murthy's confirmation because of the latter's position on gun control. *Wonkblog* meanwhile [looks](#) at whether or not the Surgeon General's role can still be powerful.

This week the midterm election that began last month finally drew to a close, with the Republican Party's victory in an Arizona House seat. *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that with this victory, the GOP now holds 247 House seats, its largest advantage since 1928. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the incoming House Budget Chairman, Tom Price (R-GA) is already angling for a showdown over whether or not the debt ceiling should be raised or suspended, an issue which will likely come to a head mid-summer next year.

Moving on to the Senate, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) on Saturday on what they say is an 'epic... temper tantrum' by Republicans in the lead up to the vote on the government funding bill over President Obama's immigration orders. On Sunday, *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that the 'Cromnibus' spending bill has been passed by the Senate, and that the (for now) Senate Majority Leader, Democrat Harry Reid of Nevada, was able to use the delay caused by Ted Cruz to push through confirmations. Cruz's delay also allowed the Senate to confirm 12 of President Obama's judicial nominees [according](#) to *Daily Kos*.



Harry Reid Credit: Ralph Alswang, Center for American Progress Action Fund (CC-BY-SA-2.0))

On Monday, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia is wrong in his recent assertion that torture is acceptable under the Constitution. They say that given that the U.S. accepts the Geneva Conventions and other human rights treaties as law (having ratified and signed them), torture is illegal under Article Six, Clause Two of the Constitution, which states that: "*all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby*".

The Senate's CIA Torture Report

The fallout continued from last week's release of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report into the Central Intelligence Agency's use of 'enhanced interrogation techniques' in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. On Sunday, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the defense that some have provided for torture that it should be used 'because it works' is the most troubling, because it leads to the possibility that it might be used again. *The Atlantic* [reports](#) on comments over the weekend from former Vice-President Dick Cheney, who defended the CIA's techniques, and stated that he would 'do it again in a minute'. On Monday, *Informed Comment* gives three ways that the mainstream media has left the government [off the hook](#) for its torture techniques. They [say](#) that the media's coverage of the new report rests on the false assumptions that torture worked, ended when President George W. Bush left office, and that the only torture that counts is that which happens in foreign wars.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

The growth in the use of hydraulic fracturing has led falling oil prices in recent months. This week *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that these falling prices are doing President Obama's foreign policy for him, given that they are hurting Russia, Iran and Venezuela. Meanwhile, *American Thinker* [says](#) that the U.S. cannot remain indifferent to human rights violations in Iran, such as public executions.

On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that Americans are ready to end the embargo against Cuba, with 57 percent in favour. *The Daily Signal* justifies the embargo, writing this week that sanctions have worked, despite what President Obama has claimed. They [say](#) that communist Cuba has placed people into labor camps and prisons, and exported Marxism-Leninism throughout Latin America.

This week also saw Sony Pictures withdraw its new film, *The Interview*, from release after threats from North Korean hackers. *RedState* [writes](#) that as a nation, the U.S. should react to this sort of aggression, and not give in to their demands, and calls liberals cowardly for doing so.

Obamacare and health policy



Credit: Neon Tommy (CC-BY- SA-2.0)

Monday was the deadline for people to enroll in this year's Obamacare round. *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that the Affordable Care Act is on course to 'smash' its 2015 sign up target of 9.1 million. They say that as many as 10.5 million are likely to have signed up by the end of 2015. *Wonkblog* meanwhile writes that most of Obamacare's existing customers are ignoring the deadline, something that means that they could be missing out on significant savings by not shopping around. *RedState* also [warns](#) that those who currently not have health insurance have until the middle of February, 2015, to purchase a plan or will face hefty fines from the Internal Revenue Service – \$325, or 2 percent of their family's income.

The Federalist writes this week that it's not just Obamacare that has problems – it is the entire health insurance industry. They [say](#) that while health insurance is not bad, it is grossly overused, and that it should be for catastrophic events, not regular expenses.

The economy and society

This week *The Atlantic* looks at [child labor in the U.S.](#) They say that the Occupational Health and Safety Administration has faced declining budgets, which has meant a rollback of investigations into child labor. They say that has received fewer and fewer child labor complaints, which raises questions over what it might be missing.

On Monday, *Occasional Planet* [makes the case](#) for police acting as social workers using ‘community policing’ techniques in the wake of the several high profile deaths of black people that have occurred recently at the hands of police. Meanwhile, the *Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at the ‘new energy’ of the gun control movement two years after the shootings at Sandy Hook.

Did you get a good night’s sleep last night? *Wonkblog* [reports](#) that more than 1/3rd of American adults get less than seven hours of sleep a week on weekdays, with many health implications.

The Daily Signal [says](#) that in 13 states, gas is now selling for less than \$2 a gallon.

And finally...

Wonkblog [says](#) that according to a new report from the U.S. Mint, it costs 1.7 cents to make a penny, and 8 cents to make a nickel.

Outside the Beltway [looks](#) at what happened when two political commentators (who are also brothers) from both sides of the political spectrum got a call from their mother during a debate on C-SPAN.

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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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