

DHS shutdown looms, Obama vetoes Keystone XL, and cuts mean IRS audit troubles: US national blog round up for 21 – 27 February

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

Last week saw the former Mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, accuse President Obama of not loving America, causing uproar amongst progressives. On Sunday, *TownHall* [writes](#) that while Obama does love America, he just does not like it a great deal, given how much he wants to fundamentally transform it. By Monday, Giuliani had ‘walked back’ his comments on Obama according to some, but *No More Mister Nice* blog [reckons](#) that his statement that he did not intend to ‘question President Obama’s motives’ are a ‘phony, dishonest, non-walkback’, given that is exactly what Giuliani did.

The President’s executive actions on immigration continued to head the Washington DC news cycle, after a judge last week ordered that the deportation relief be halted for the time being while he reviewed a GOP led-suit to stop it entirely. *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Monday that the Obama administration has asked the Judge to lift the nationwide hold on the immigration action, which was due to begin on February 18th.

This week also saw the President use his veto for only the third time since taking office. *The American Interest* [says](#) that Obama’s veto of the bill to approve the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline is nothing to get too excited about, given that the project is still mired in regulatory indecision, with the State department yet to decide on its approval.

Thursday and Friday saw the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Orlando, Florida. *Roll Call’s At the Races* [says](#) that many notable Republican Senators are staying away from the meeting, because of their concerns over their seat vulnerabilities ahead of the 2016 elections. On Thursday, *The Daily Signal* gives [12 takeaways](#) from the conference, including that New Jersey Governor Chris Christie’s speech drew laughs and cheers over his ‘straight-talking’ style, and that Wisconsin Governor cast himself as the champion of ‘hard working taxpayers’.

Elections and the road to 2016

On the weekend, the Democratic Party released its post-mortem report on its defeat in last year’s disastrous midterm elections. *The Atlantic* [reviews](#) the nine-page (including covers) document saying that while it does acknowledge the party’s lack of a cohesive narrative, it also does little to cement the party’s identity.

For many months, commentators on the left have been hoping that Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) will make a bid for the presidency in 2016, despite her assertions that she is not running. *PoliticoUSA* [writes](#) on Saturday that it is time that we believed Warren, especially given her recent meeting with former Secretary of State, and likely candidate, Hillary Clinton. Turning to Clinton herself, *Outside the Beltway* looks at some recent allegations that the foundation launched by her husband, Bill Clinton, may be a conflict of interest. They [say](#) that donations made by foreign governments to the Clinton Foundation may expose Hillary Clinton to accusations of foreign influence.

Moving on to potential Republican candidates for the 2016 presidential election, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) on Saturday that Florida Senator, Marco Rubio was heckled at a book signing over his comments on immigration.

The star of Wisconsin Governor, Scott Walker, has been in ascendance in recent weeks, with many now believing him to be a near-front runner for the GOP's 2016 nomination. *FreakOutNation* [says](#) that during his speech to CPAC this week, Walker stated that he was able to deal with the threat of ISIS because of his experience with dealing with union protestors in Wisconsin.

On Wednesday, *Crooks & Liars* [says](#) that businessman, and television personality, Donald Trump is considering a 2016 presidential bid. They [reckon](#) that we should in no way take the possibility of a Trump bid seriously.

AmericaBlog has an interesting [roundup](#) of the GOP 2016 contenders who have refused to say that Obama loves America, following Rudy Giuliani's comments on the president last week. These include, Scott Walker, Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush, and Louisiana Governor, Bobby Jindal.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

Last year saw considerable debate over the future of the Export-Import Bank, with many conservative Republicans arguing that it should not be re-authorized, and that it was an example of 'crony capitalism'. *Red State* [writes](#) on Sunday that the Ex-Im Bank has shot itself in the foot somewhat by removing a website of previously available public data on the applications it accepts and rejects. They say that it is not a good look for the organization, given that it needs to avoid looking 'crooked'.

Attorney General, Eric Holder announced his retirement last year, but the appointment of his replacement, Loretta Lynch, has been held up in Senate hearings. *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) this week that despite being criticized for not jailing employees of HSBC for money laundering, her appointment was supported by a 12-8 vote in the Senate Judiciary Committee this week, paving the way for a full Senate vote.

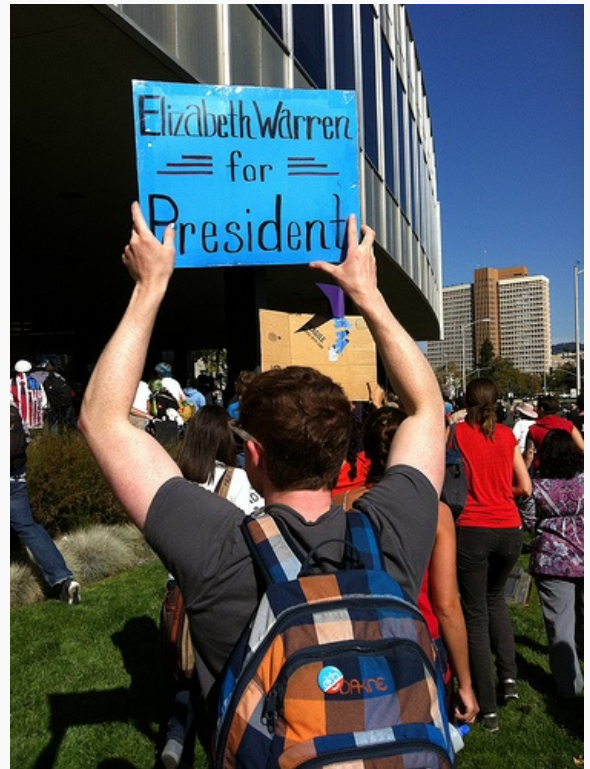
On Thursday, *Crooks & Liars* [has the news](#) that the Federal Communications Commission has voted to approve new rules for Internet providers that would regulate them as a public utility – so called 'net neutrality' regulations. They say that under the new rules, it will be illegal for providers to slow down content or establish 'fast lanes' available for an extra fee.

Perspectives [looks](#) at another agency this week – the Internal Revenue Service. They say that budget cuts pushed by the Republican Party have led to a massive fall in the audit rate for individuals, to 0.86 percent, a 21 percent fall since 2010. This means that it is likely that tax collections will fall, and budget deficits will rise.

Illinois Congressman Aaron Schock has not had a great few weeks. After being criticized for an expensive 'Downton Abbey' style redecoration of his Capitol Hill Office, *America blog* [says](#) that he spent \$8,000 in taxpayers' money, and \$5,000 from his Political Action Committee on flight expenses, which may violate House rules.

The specter of another shutdown (though partial this time) has loomed this week, with an impasse in Congress over funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). *National Journal* [says](#) that we can't count on Congress avoiding another shutdown, and that everyone from President Obama to the Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell (KY), to Senate Democrats are to blame. A ray of light appeared on Wednesday, with the Senate voting 98-2 to advance a new 'clean' bill to fund DHS shorn of riders that would halt President Obama's executive action on immigration, [reports](#) *Daily Kos*. The next obstacle is the House, which has already passed its own bill which does address Obama's immigration actions.

Foreign policy, defense and trade



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On Saturday, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) on comments from former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld that the U.S. is losing the War on Terror, because of a lack of metrics to know if they are winning or losing. They say that a similar lack of metrics did not seem to bother him when he was prosecuting the War on Terror under President George W. Bush.

President Obama has been criticized by some on the right for failing to face up to violent extremism. *The Daily Signal* [says](#), that though he has

recently been hosting a summit on that subject, his lack of effective action over the last six years undercuts his credibility as a global leader on the issue. They comment that his pursuit of troop withdrawals in Iraq and Afghanistan has created a power vacuum that has left the field open for radical Islamist terrorists.

Red State is also [critical](#) of the President over his desire to reach a deal with Iran over its nuclear program. They say that his desire for a deal, without regard to the consequences, means that the current negotiations may lead to Iran being able to develop nuclear weapons after only ten years.

Obamacare and health policy

Next week the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in the *King v. Burwell* case, which concerns whether or not people who have signed up for health insurance under Obamacare can receive government subsidies through federal exchanges in states which have not set up their own insurance exchanges. *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that in anticipation of the ruling, Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) has a backup plan in case the subsidies are declared invalid. Hatch may have a plan, but the Department for Health and Human Security does not, according to *Daily Kos*. They [report](#) that Secretary Sylvia Burwell has said that there is no regulatory fix if the subsidies are struck down. *Wonkblog* [meanwhile](#) says that the Supreme Court has the potential to 'wreck' Obamacare, even as the uninsurance rate has dropped to 13.8 percent, down from 17.3 percent.

The economy and society

On Sunday (perhaps fittingly), *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at a new report on church attendance by state. They say that Utah residents are the most likely to attend a weekly church service, while residents of Vermont are the least likely.

Last year saw the legalization of marijuana in Colorado and Washington, with marijuana businesses making nearly \$3 billion. *Hit & Run* [covers](#) at the industry's big problem – most banks are afraid to take money from marijuana businesses due to fear of money laundering charges, meaning that many must work in cash.

Last week a train carrying 3.1 million gallons of crude oil derailed in West Virginia, causing a massive fire and evacuation of locals. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Monday that we should get used to this kind of disaster, given that the Department of Transportation has predicted that there will be an average of ten derailments of such trains every year for the next decade. This increase in risk is due to the rise in flammable liquids transported by rail, driven by the shale oil boom in North Dakota and Montana.

The west coast was recently stricken by a labor dispute between port workers and their employers which saw a slowdown that was estimated to have cost the national economy \$2 billion per day. *The Atlantic* [says](#) that only 14,000 workers managed to slow down the entire U.S. economy given that 90 percent of consumer goods are transported on ships.

Despite the ongoing of Congressional wrangling over immigration, a majority of people in every state actually



favor a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, reports the *Monkey Cage*. They [say](#) that survey interviews with 52,000 Americans has shown that 52 percent or more of people in each state agree offering a path to citizenship is the best option for dealing with people in the country illegally.

How dangerous is walking? Quite dangerous, [according](#) to statistics from *Roll Call's The Container*. They say that nearly 2,100 pedestrians were killed by cars and trucks in the first half of 2014, but that this number has been in decline in recent years.

And finally...

It's been snowing in Washington D.C, so what better place for kids

to sled but on the hillside of the Capitol? Not any more. *Roll Call's Heard on the Hill* [says](#) that Congress has nixed the activity after years of Hill Police looking the other way.

Think Americans drink bad coffee? You're correct, at least so [says](#) *Wonkblog*, who warn that Americans are actually drinking worse coffee now than in the past.

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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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