

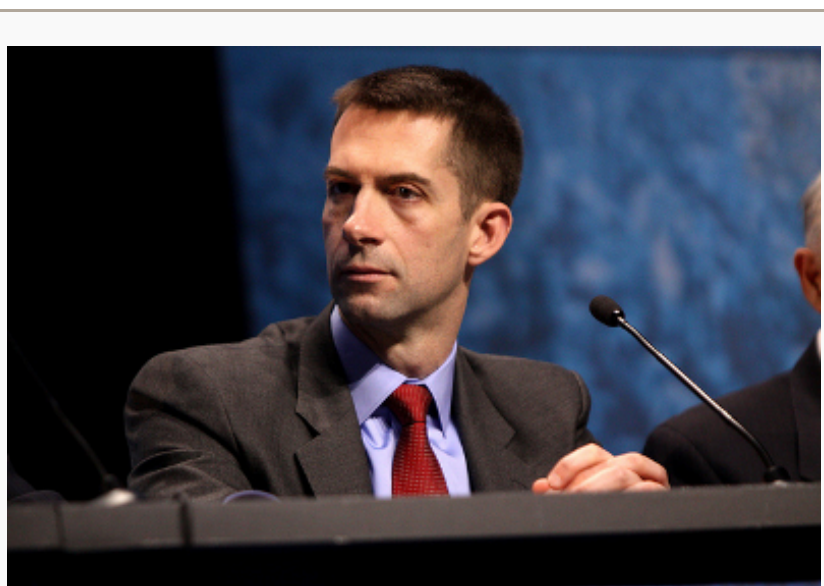
Obama's Selma speech, Tom Cotton's Iran letter, and questions remain over Clinton emails: US national blog round up for 6 – 13 March

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

This week President Obama gave a widely trailed speech in Selma, Alabama, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the civil rights march from that city to, Montgomery, Alabama. After the speech, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that it is one of the first times a politician has explained America the way that they feel about it – that the American character is one of change and remaking the status quo, and the country. The *White House Dossier* is unusually positive about President Obama, [writing](#) Monday that they thought it was a great speech – even if they did not agree with much of its contents. On Tuesday, *Townhall* talks about the president more generally, wondering what has happened to his [moral authority](#). They say that Obama's continual misrepresentation on issues such as Obamacare, Syria and the Keystone XL pipeline mean that he has 'fouled' the climate for national conversation.

For many, one of the more surprising of this week's developments, was, as *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#), the letter signed by 47 Senate Republicans, and sent to senior members of Iran's regime, which warned them whatever they negotiate with President Obama may be undone by the next president. *Outside the Beltway* [comments](#) that the Senate GOP's letter is likely to achieve the opposite of what it intends. They say that rather than helping to get a better deal with Iran in negotiations over its nuclear program, the letter may undermine a deal, which could lead to a nuclear armed Iran. The letter was the brainchild of freshman Senator, Tom Cotton of Arkansas, who *RedState* claims is the [most powerful man in](#)



Rep. Tom Cotton Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

[Washington](#). They say that Cotton's letter has forced the Secretary of State, John Kerry to admit the negotiations were non-binding, and that he is one of the few who have "been able to throw Barack Obama off his game".

Elections and the road to 2016

The Daily Signal [reports](#) on the recent visit of nine likely Republican presidential candidates to the Iowa Ag Summit. They say that while the candidates were in no hurry to propose getting rid of government involvement in agriculture in the form of taxpayer subsidies, they were critical of government regulation of agriculture, especially that of the Environmental Protection Agency.

On Monday, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's signing of legislation in his state that imposes new restrictions on organized labor has marked his return to 'union-busting politics'. They say that Walker's continued confrontations with unions have pushed him into the top tier of GOP presidential contenders.

Meanwhile, *The Democratic Truth* [says](#) that New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie is now behind Scott Walker and another top-tier presidential hopeful, Jeb Bush. Christie now finds himself in 6th place among Republican and right-leaning voters, with Bush and Walker leading the field.

This week, the fallout over Hillary Clinton's private email scandal continued. On Saturday, *PoliticoUSA* [points out](#) that other 2016 presidential hopefuls from the Republican Party, including Rick Perry, Chris Christie, Scott Walker, Bobby Jindal and Jeb Bush have all used private email addresses while undertaking government business. On Tuesday, Clinton gave a press conference to clear up some of the outstanding questions over her use of a private email server. *Townhall* comments that the 20-minute news conference has raised more questions than it answered. They [say](#) that the main question is; what gave Clinton the right to determine which of her emails were personal, and thus deleted? *National Journal*, meanwhile, has [five questions](#) that Clinton did not answer at her press conference – these include what her motive was for using a secret server registered to her home, does she really want to run for president, and what else might she be hiding? On Thursday, *The Federalist* [wonders](#) why no one will challenge Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination. They say that if Clinton did decide not to run, there are far more competent candidates, such as Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Monday, *National Journal* reports that the Supreme Court has agreed to hear a case concerning the constitutionality of sentencing mentally ill defendants to death. They [say](#) that Timothy Lee Hurst, a Florida death-row inmate, has appealed his sentence, citing that he had brain damage at the time he committed first degree murder. *The Federalist*, meanwhile, [argues](#) that lifetime judicial appointments should be ended because the judiciary is political and that it needs the restraint that term-limits would bring.

Last week the U.S. Department of Justice released its report into last year's shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. *Hit & Run* [writes](#) this week that the report makes a strong case that the police officer, Darren Wilson, shot Brown in self-defense. They say that even if readers are not convinced that Wilson's actions were justified, they will have a better understanding of why convicting him would have been difficult, by reading the report.



A U.S. Secret Service agent waits to open the motorcade door as President Barack Obama arrives at the Uptown Theater in Kansas City, Mo., July 30, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Amanda Lucidon)

On Thursday *Outside the Beltway* reports on another apparent SNAFU by the U.S. Secret Service. They [say](#) that last week two potentially drunk Secret Service members drove a car into the White House's security barricades after a late-night party. They comment that the incident is likely to raise more questions about an agency that has been under fire for the better part of a year.

In recent weeks the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has been trying to ban a type of gun ammunition that they claim is armor-piercing. *Hit & Run* rather triumphantly [announces](#) this week that the ATF has backed down on its plan to ban the ammo, after hundreds of lawmakers objected.

With only 100 women in Congress out of a total of 535 legislators, the body is not exactly representative of wider

U.S. society. This week, the *Monkey Cage* looks at what would change if there were more women in Congress – quite a bit, apparently. They [say](#) that if women were better represented, then issues such as child care, abortion and pay equity would be more likely to be discussed, and that the legislature might even work more effectively.

Looking at issues before Congress in general, *The Hill's Congress blog* [writes](#) this week on three things that it should ask the Obama administration about its proposal for the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) against ISIL. These include why the measure does not address the 2001 AUMF, or include a sunset clause for the earlier measure, and the meaning of the terms 'degrade and defeat' in reference to ISIL.

Last week saw Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) bring a 'clean' bill to fund the Department of Homeland Security, which was under threat of a shutdown, much to the dismay of his conservative colleagues in Congress. *Townhall* [says](#) that House Democrats have vowed to protect Boehner from any coup attempt that the right of his party might bring. With last week's shutdown threat averted, the next main bump on the Congressional road is the debt ceiling, which is likely to be reached on Sunday. *Crooks & Liars* takes the Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell (R-KY) to task for his comments this week that "We'll figure some way to handle that", [saying](#) that he has no real way of controlling his Tea Party caucus. Staying on the Senate, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on Monday that the nominee for Attorney-General, Loretta Lynch, has now been waiting for a confirmation vote for more than 120 days, despite the Senate confirming a number of other nominees this week. [According to Hit & Run](#) there was a rare moment of bipartisanship in the Senate this week as well, with the introduction of a bill that would end the federal ban on marijuana for those who grow, supply, or use the drugs for medical purposes, in compliance with state law. The CAREERS Act was introduced by Rand Paul (R-KY), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). On Wednesday, *PoliticoUSA* [looks](#) at another bill, the Justice for Victims of Human Trafficking Act, which helps local government to fund grants that will benefit victims of human trafficking. They say that Republicans included anti-abortion language in the bill without telling Democrats, and that the inclusion may well kill the bill.

On Wednesday, *United Liberty* comments on the aforementioned letter from 47 Senate Republicans to the Iranian regime. They [comment](#) that while sending the letter was 'dumb', it was not unprecedented, given that then Representative John Kerry met with Nicaraguan Sandanista leader, Daniel Ortega in 1985 in order to undermine the Reagan administration. *The Volokh Conspiracy* meanwhile [wonders](#) if the Senators broke the Logan Act, which prohibits Americans from corresponding with foreign governments, without the authority of the U.S. government, with the intent to influence them.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

Many in Congress advocate a much more hawkish position towards Iran than the administration's current policy of negotiation. *Informed Comment* [writes](#) this week on what might happen if the hawks got their way. They say that if the U.S. was to bomb Iranian nuclear enrichment facilities on a regular basis, this would lead to all-out war, and further destabilize Iraq as well.

On Tuesday this week, *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) that opposition in Congress to the U.N Arms Trade Treaty is growing once again. They say that 58 Senators and 191 House members oppose the ratification of the treaty, which regulates the trade in weapons.

Obamacare and health policy

The Atlantic tries to [clear up](#) some of the recent confusion over projections for Obamacare premiums. They say that while premiums are rising, this is happening more slowly than had been projected. *Wonkblog* meanwhile looks at what might happen if the Supreme Court throws out subsidies that are currently available to people who get health insurance via federal exchanges. They [say](#) that if these are withdrawn, then people in the southern states will be hit the hardest – Florida, for example, has more than 1.5 million enrollees getting federal help.

The economy and society



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Daily Kos [reports](#) on Thursday that many states have passed laws which reduce workers' compensation benefits. They say that not only have they shrunk benefits, many states have also introduced arbitrary time limits, which may end before workers have recovered. Want to buy a new house? *Wonkblog* has a helpful [map](#) showing the salary you need to buy a place in 27 cities. In Pittsburgh, you only need to pull down around \$34,000, while if you're looking at New York, it's more like \$90,000.

The Atlantic [looks](#) at a recent trend in some cities towards pitting civil servants against the private sector in service provision. They say that initiatives of 'managed competition' in cities such as Chicago help to improve performance and lower costs.

On Thursday, *Roll Call's The Container* [reports](#) that the Canadian government has proposed new safety standards for oil tank cars, in the wake of several dramatic derailments of trains carrying Canadian oil in the U.S.

And finally...

Did you remember to turn your clocks back this week? [According](#) to *Wonkblog* daylight saving time actually increases energy use, and therefore costs.

Have you been watching the new Netflix series of *House of Cards*? The *Monkey Cage* [reckons](#) it's the worst show about American politics, ever. We couldn't possibly comment.

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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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