

# Trump's debate boycott, the Democrats' Iowa dead heat, and three easy ways to dismantle Obamacare: US national blog roundup for 23 – 29 January

USAPP Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson** looks at the best in political blogging from around the Beltway.

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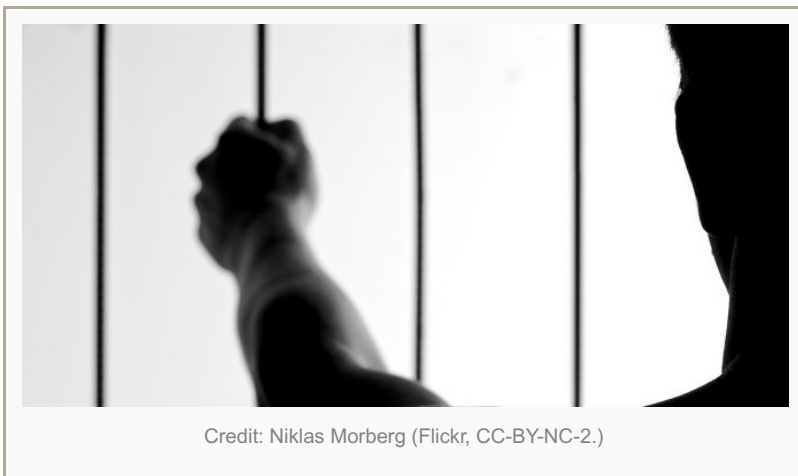
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## Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Monday this week, *Townhall* [writes](#) on recent comments from President Obama that one of the few regrets of his presidency is that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better. They say that he should regret this, given that he doesn't seem to have made any effort to change the culture of Washington DC during his presidency. *Perspectives* meanwhile [comments](#) this week that seven years into his presidency, it's clear that the Obama economy has overcome the Republican Party's attempts at sabotage, such as their opposition to the stimulus and the Federal Reserve's program of Quantitative Easing, and their threats over the raising of the debt ceiling.



Obama this week issued executive actions which would ban the use of solitary confinement for juvenile offenders in federal prisons across the country, [reports](#) *The Atlantic*. The orders will also restrict the use of solitary confinement as a punishment for inmates who commit low-level infractions within prisons.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) Sunday that a new poll has shown that despite the party's claims that Americans want all abortions to be banned, two-thirds of voters are 'outraged' at the GOP's attacks on women's reproductive rights.

*The American Prospect* [reflects](#) on what has happened to the battle for the soul of the Republican Party. Rather than debating the party's future and its identity, they say, conservatives are now facing a choice between an insurgent that can't stand (Texas Senator Ted Cruz), and a demagogue that they can't trust (Donald Trump). *FiveThirtyEight* also [delves](#) into this, commenting that the GOP might be failing, with the old logic that parties will tend to nominate credible and more traditional candidates now seeming to be out of date in light of the rise of Trump.

## The 2016 election

This week saw reports that former New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg is considering a 2016 presidential run as an independent. *Monkey Cage* [comments](#) that it might not be crazy for Bloomberg to run – he has an opening a centrist candidate, and he has the money to finance a bid. *Powerline* is much more pessimistic, [warning](#) that we shouldn't get our hopes up about Bloomberg, given that in the public's mind he is the personification of the 'nanny state'.

*Roll Call's Rothenblog* [says](#) that in a previous cycle, the two candidates that many thought would be the 'next' choice of their parties – former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton – would be 'coasting' to their parties' nominations. Instead they may both be playing the long game, staying in their nominating contests long enough for voters to decide to turn to them as their respective primary fields begin to thin out. Meanwhile, *Politica Animal* [identifies](#) what they say is the underlying sexism of the 2016 presidential race, with many voters wanting a president with 'testicular fortitude' – something that is a challenge to the election of Hillary Clinton as the country's first woman president.

Looking now at 2016's Senate races, *Roll Call's At the Races* [wonders](#) if the pro-LGBT stances of Senators like Rob Portman of Ohio, Mark Kirk of Illinois, and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski will hurt their re-election chances in the fall.

## The Democrats' 2016 campaign

On Sunday, *PoliticusUSA* has the [news](#) that the Iowa Democratic Caucus is a dead heat between Hillary Clinton and Vermont Senator, Bernie Sanders, with the race having been a critical back and forth between the two over the past few weeks. In Iowa, *Hit & Run* [says](#), turnout isn't everything – in a race this close, it's the **only** thing.

*American Thinker* [weighs in](#) on the Democratic primary race, wondering if Vice-President Joe Biden and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren will come to the rescue if and when Hillary Clinton's campaign melts down.

Will the Democrats be able to win back the House of Representatives in the fall? Not a chance [writes](#) *The Fix*; for this to happen, the party would need to hold onto six competitive seats, win all 27 of the Republicans' seats, and then win a few more safe GOP seats as well.

Turning to what Bernie and Hillary have been up to this week:

### Hillary Clinton

- How the scandal over the former Secretary of State's private email server is getting worse ([Hit & Run](#)).
- Friday saw the State Department acknowledge that 22 of Clinton's emails contained "top secret" information ([Post Politics](#))
- Is Clinton 'going down in flames', and will leave Sanders as the next Democratic nominee? ([Townhall](#))
- Did President Obama just 'put his thumb on the scale' for Clinton over Sanders? ([The Fix](#)).

- At a town hall meeting this week, Clinton this week gave an ‘impassioned’ answer to a question from a Sanders supporter who doubted her character ([Post Politics](#)).

## Bernie Sanders

- Last week the Vermont Senator announced his ‘Medicare for all plan’, a plan which some say would ‘sock it’ to working seniors ([Red State](#)).
- Will Sanders’ commitment to raising taxes this week come back to haunt him? ([Post Politics](#)).
- Despite what many say (including accusing him of being a communist), Sanders’ record isn’t extreme – he’s actually quantitatively more moderate than the average Republican ([Americablog](#))
- That said, Sanders did seek to reassure voters this week about his label as a ‘democratic socialist’, focusing on his desire to tackle inequality ([Post Politics](#))
- Has Bernie Sanders been able to convince many people that he can win? Not really ([The Fix](#)).
- Sanders said this week that the criticism he’s getting from the Clinton campaign reminds him of what Obama got in 2008 in the lead up to Iowa ([Post Politics](#)).
- At a rally this week, Sanders asked the crowd for their stories about living on \$12,000 a year, and had some very moving responses ([The Fix](#)).

## The Republican Party’s 2016 campaign

*American Thinker* [writes](#) on Sunday on the ‘soft civil war’ within the Republican Party between supporters of Ted Cruz and Donald Trump, especially those that are online. Speaking of Trump and Cruz, *The Fix* [comments](#) that it’s good news that the *Des Moines Register* – which recently endorsed Florida Senator Marco Rubio – isn’t actually a kingmaker in Iowa. *Red State* [reminds](#) us though, that when it comes to polling, we really have no clue what’s actually going on in Iowa, and that no one can truly predict who’s going to win with any degree of confidence.

*Political Animal* [looks](#) at the extent to which Cruz and Trump’s candidacies should be seen as ‘anti-Obama’ candidacies, they are bombastic and intolerant, where Obama is patient and inclusive. Given the popularity of Trump in the current primary, it’s worth asking where the ‘Republican regular’ voters will go. *Red State* [says](#) that Marco Rubio is a possibility, but that many will also head towards Cruz. *FiveThirtyEight* [writes](#) on Thursday that nominating Cruz or Trump might not have the effect of ‘dooming’ Republicans further down the ballot – history shows that only about 50 percent of the relationship between how much the House changes in an election can be explained by the Democratic presidential vote percentage margin.



Credit: Steve Rhodes (Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 2.0)

## The Republican Party’s 7<sup>th</sup> debate

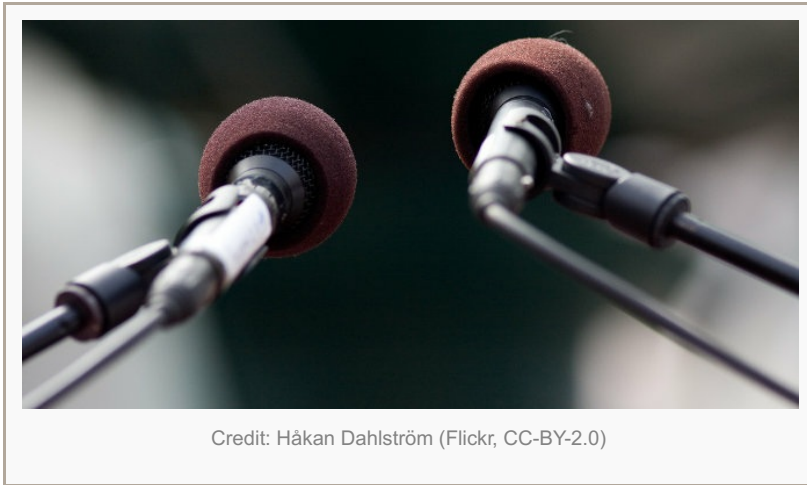
This week saw the GOP’s primary candidates square off in a debate in Des Moines Iowa. Well, all the candidates but one...

- Citing bias in the moderation of Fox News host, Megyn Kelly, Donald Trump announced that he would be pulling out of the debate this week ([Hit & Run](#)).

- In the lead up, [The Fix](#) gives the seven big issues in the debate, including Trump's lack of attendance, and the candidate's Christian faith.
- This week's debate is likely to be the last one to feature an 'undercard' debate between the lower-polling candidates ([Red State](#)).
- The debate have us a glimpse off a GOP primary race that might have been – one without Trump ([The Atlantic](#))...
- ...and no-one really missed him anyways ([The Federalist](#))...



Senator Bernie Sanders Credit: Senate Democrats (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)



Credit: Håkan Dahlström (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

- ... though it turns out he was on Americans' minds, even if he wasn't there ([The Fix](#)).
- Five takeaways from the debate, including that Ted Cruz is 'off' in the absence of Trump ([Red State](#))...
- ... six more takeaways, including that Kentucky Senator Rand Paul had a 'fantastic' night ([The Federalist](#))
- Mocking Donald Trump for not attending the debate did not do Fox News any favors ([The Fix](#)).
- The debate may have helped Jeb Bush, though likely not enough ([Outside the Beltway](#)).

## Donald Trump

No Beltway blog roundup could be complete without an overview of how The Donald's been making news this week:

- The conservative magazine *National Review* has it in for Trump, devoting an entire issue on why he shouldn't be president ([Townhall](#))
- Trump was on the defensive at an Iowa rally this week, slamming both the *National Review* and conservative radio host, Glenn Beck, who also penned a critique of the New York billionaire in the magazine ([Post Politics](#))
- In a roundabout way, Trump praised Ronald Reagan's 1986 amnesty deal with Democrats this week ([Red State](#))
- Trump reckons that he is so popular that he could actually shoot someone, and people would still support him ([Post Politics](#))
- Explaining voters' love affair with Donald Trump in simple terms ([American Thinker](#))
- How to make Trump president in four easy steps ([The Conscience of a Liberal](#))



- Three more reasons why Trump will be the nominee ( [TPM](#))
- Does the embrace of Trump by Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) this week signify that the GOP establishment is coming to terms with him? ( [Post Politics](#))
- The establishment may be going over to Trump's side because they see him as a dealmaker – especially in comparison to Ted Cruz ( [Townhall](#)).
- Perhaps the GOP establishment has seen the folly of their strategy to defeat Trump? ( [The Fix](#)).



Credit: thierry ehmann (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

- If they did want to stop him, South Carolina will be the GOP establishment's last chance ( [Townhall](#))
- There may be some uncanny parallels between Donald Trump and FDR ( [The Federalist](#)).
- How former Alaska Governor, Sarah Palin's endorsement of Trump could help him to win over Ted Cruz's supporters ( [Monkey Cage](#)).
- Freshman Senator Ben Sasse (R-NE) has been giving Trump some grief on The Donald's home turf – Twitter ( [Roll Call's Heard on the Hill](#)).
- Trump has been stealing the show this week by opting out of the GOP's debate ( [The White House Dossier](#)).
- Can Trump run against Fox News? He's betting that he can. ( [Red State](#))
- Thursday night saw Trump hold a fundraiser for veterans rather than attend the GOP debate – but is he raising money for a 'bogus' charity? ( [Crooks & Liars](#))
- A new poll shows that 69 percent of Americans are 'anxious' about a potential President Trump ( [The Fix](#)).
- The three policy issues that are propelling Trump and his followers: immigration, foreign policy, and elite corruption ( [The Federalist](#))
- The latest polls show that Trump may well end up running the table in Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina ( [Outside the Beltway](#)).

## Ted Cruz

- Despite his earlier claims that he lost his health insurance because of Obamacare, the Texas Senator does actually have coverage ( [Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Most people seem not to like Ted Cruz. He seems fine with that. ( [Post Politics](#))
- The case for Ted Cruz – tax reform, spending cuts, monetary policy reform, and deregulation ( [American Thinker](#)).

- This week Cruz garnered the endorsement of Texas' former Governor Rick Perry, who praised him as a 'man of principle', who would be able to get things done as President ([Red State](#)).

### Marco Rubio

- The junior Senator from Florida this week pledged to double the number of border control agents to 40,000 if he's elected to the presidency ([Hit & Run](#)).
- Rubio's moment is coming any minute now. Well, maybe. ([Daily Kos](#)).

### Jeb Bush

- Will the former Florida Governor 'deploy' his brother, George W Bush on the campaign trail? It might not hurt – the 43<sup>rd</sup> president is actually now quite popular with Republicans ([Post Politics](#))
- Bush's campaign steps up attacks on Marco Rubio, some have accused it of being joyless ([Powerline](#)).
- Joyless or not, some of Bush's biggest donors are worried about how his campaign is spending money ([Daily Kos](#)).

### Chris Christie

- The New Jersey Governor is kind of a jerk ([Red State](#))
- Christie's been back and forth from New Hampshire to New Jersey to deal with the aftereffects of winter storm Jonas in the Garden State, and he's been using this responsiveness as part of his presidential pitch ([Townhall](#))



New Jersey Governor Chris Christie Credit; Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

### The rest

- Kentucky Senator Rand Paul now has even more to worry about than not being able to get on to the national debate stage – he has a new challenger for his Senate seat ([Post Politics](#))
- Does anyone know why former Virginia Governor, Jim Gilmore is even running for president? ([The Atlantic](#)).

## Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Monday, *Daily Kos* has the [news](#) that despite the pleas of Justice Breyer, the US Supreme Court has announced that they will not hear a case which challenges the death penalty on Eighth Amendment grounds. The case centers on the claim that the death penalty is a form of cruel and unusual punishment.

Government, what's it good for? *Hit & Run* this week [looks](#) at a new poll which finds that six out of ten Americans have little confidence that the federal government is able to fix problems. They say that the poll's results could go some way towards explaining the populist appeal of candidates such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. One part of the government that *The American Prospect* [lacks confidence](#) in is the 'broken' immigration system. They comment that the Obama administration's practice of deporting undocumented immigrants while acknowledging they are fleeing violence in Central America is perpetuating a decades-old tradition of immigration policies which ignore the root causes of migration.

Last month the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates for the first time in seven years. Did they make a big mistake? *Wonkblog* [says](#) that the markets think they might have – selling stocks since the start of the year, and bondholders now worried that inflation is unlikely to hit the Fed's 2 percent target over the next decade. They say that if the nascent does come to a premature end, then it will be because the Fed has once again underestimated how much it has already tightened monetary policy and overestimated the strength of the economy.

Moving on to Congress, *Roll Call's Hawkings Here* [looks](#) at how an obscure legislative rider, enacted twenty years ago was used last week to end a fight between Congressional Republicans and Democrats over the Obama administration's efforts to subject more waterways to environmental regulation.

Sick of gridlock in DC? Well apparently it's your fault writes *The Fix*. They [say](#) that while most Americans say that they don't like the fact that Congress can't get much done, Congressional leaders are unlikely to get any blowback from voters for not trying to get along with one another. It turns out that a great deal of Americans don't have much common ground with each other, either.

## Foreign policy, defense and trade



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On Sunday, *American Thinker* looks back at the Iran deal, assessing it on the basis that Iran got some things and the US got some things as well. After doing the math, they [reckon](#) that Iran got the much better end of the deal, being able to test ballistic missiles, capture US sailors, sanctions relief, while the US had some of their prisoners released, people who they say should never have been in Iranian prisons to begin with.

*Townhall* [says](#) this week that by fast-tracking a war authorization, Congress is writing President Obama a blank check for war, at a time when it's clear that Washington plans to expand its war in the Middle East. Talking of President Obama's foreign policy, *The Hill's Congress blog* [wonders](#) whether or not it suffers from what they call 'Clinton syndrome' – inaction and indecisiveness leading to often reluctant interventions.

Will foreign policy be a major issue in this year's presidential election? *Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at what we know already and argues that while foreign policy is likely to only feature occasionally in the campaign, whoever voters choose will matter significantly for US foreign policy..

## Obamacare and health policy

If a Republican does move into the White House next January, *Monkey Cage* has [three easy ways](#) that they could dismantle the Affordable Care Act, short of completely repealing it; tinkering with the ways that states expand Medicaid, changing insurance exchanges, and regulatory reform.

On Wednesday, *Red State* [examines](#) Donald Trump's healthcare reform proposals. They say that The Donald's plans for 'TrumpCare', like Obamacare, would just be more taxpayer-funded, government run healthcare.

## The economy and society

*FiveThirtyEight* [looks](#) at murder statistics for 2015, commenting that while more Americans were murdered last year than in 2014, whether or not the increase was a large one is disputed – some statistics show a 6 percent rise in the national murder rate, while others show a spike of 16 percent. They explain that part of the difference is likely down to higher murder rates in big cities compared to elsewhere.

On Tuesday *The Atlantic* [examines](#) why the population of undocumented immigrants in the US has been falling – it's apparently now at its lowest level in a decade. They comment that the fall may be due to the decline in the US economy, or Mexico's declining birth rate and improving economy.

This time last year many commentators had picked that the Common Core educational standards would become a major issue in this year's election. While that doesn't seem to have come to pass, *The Federalist* [says](#) that a new estimate shows that the program may cost the country \$80 billion, despite rollout projections of \$17 billion.

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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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