

Lindsey Graham exits GOP primary, the Democrats' low-rated debate, and why is drug spending so high?: US national blog round up for 19 – 25 December

USAPP Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson** looks at the best in political blogging from around the Beltway. Our roundup of state political blogging will follow.

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President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Tuesday, *The Atlantic* [argues](#) that for someone who rose to the presidency because of his skills as a communicator President Obama appears to have little regard for messaging, only regarding public relations as being 'cosmetic'. They comment that to gain greater favor from voters, Obama may have to do more than explain his policies better, he may have to also adapt his policies to address their concerns.

Red State [wonders](#) on Friday if the announcement this week that the Department of Homeland Security would be taking more action to delete hundreds of undocumented immigrants would throw the presidential campaign of his former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton 'under the bus'. They say that if Obama goes through with the plan, Clinton will be forced to run to his left if she wants the support of pro-immigration voters.

Moving on to the party more generally, *The Fix* [wonders](#) why Democrats do not have more to say about Black Lives Matter.

Elections and the road to 2016

This week, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at the most vulnerable members of the US House of Representatives are for the upcoming 2016 elections. On the GOP side, Daniel Webster in Florida's 10th District and Randy Forbes in Virginia's 4th have a lot to be worried about. For the Democrats, most vulnerable are Gwen Graham in the Florida 2nd, and Ami Bera in California's 7th.

The Democrats' 2016 campaign

It was a busy week for the Democratic Party, beginning with the fallout between Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' clash with the party's National Committee (DNC) over access to voter data, and the 3rd debate for its presidential contenders. *Post Politics* writes on the stoush between Sanders, the DNC, and Hillary Clinton's campaign, [saying](#) that

while the deal reached between them ended the immediate problem, it did little to address the discord between the Sanders campaign and the DNC. On Monday, *Mischief of Faction* says that the DNC is damned if it coordinates too much with campaigns, and damned if it does not. *The Atlantic* comments that there is a dilemma facing Democratic voters: should they support Bernie Sanders, who has a fairly superficial approach to foreign policy, or Clinton, who is more hawkish than most Democrats. Moving on now to the three remaining Democratic candidates:

- Does Clinton have more support from students and teachers than Wall Street? Yes and no ([The Fix](#)).
- Clinton will win the nomination – but is an awful candidate ([Hit & Run](#)).
- Despite the claims of some, Moms and daughters may not actually be divided over Clinton ([Monkey Cage](#)).
- Questioning Clinton's support for regime change may not be a useful way for her competitors to slow her down ([The Fix](#))...
- ...though she may not be qualified to win the War on Terror ([Townhall](#)).
- Does Hillary Clinton have an 'inner Nixon' problem? ([The Hill's Congress blog](#)).
- Clinton is continuing to show her weakness against any potential GOP opponent ([Red State](#)).



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

- Bernie Sanders made a 'very blunt' apology to Clinton this week over his campaign's unauthorized access to the Clinton campaign's voter data ([The Fix](#))...
- ...though he was able to fundraise \$1 million in a day amid the 'dust-up' ([Post Politics](#)).
- Bernie Sanders may be Clinton's 'sham' opponent ([American Thinker](#)).
- A new poll shows that Sanders would defeat Donald Trump by a 'landslide' if he were to face him in a general election ([Informed Comment](#)).
- Sanders still has yet to fix his problem with non-white voters ([The Fix](#)).
- Former Maryland Governor, and presidential candidate, Martin O'Malley should be ashamed of himself for his ageism ([Crooks & Liars](#)).

The Democrats' 3rd debate

Saturday evening saw the remaining three Democratic presidential hopefuls' debate. Highlights of debate commentary included:

- The debate had relatively low ratings – only 6.7 million watched – but they probably don't mind ([The Fix](#)).

- Hillary Clinton was the big winner of the debate, while Martin O'Malley was the loser ([PoliticusUSA](#))...
- ...while Bernie Sanders complained that the DNC had timed the debate in order to protect Hillary Clinton ([Post Politics](#)).
- Why Donald Trump dominated the debate ([Post Politics](#))...
- ...and how Clinton claimed that Trump is becoming ISIS' best recruiter ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Clinton and Sanders' on-stage truce on gun control is something that we should not be fooled by – they are both still locked in an intense fight over gun-control legislation ([Post Politics](#)).
- Only Clinton promised no middle class tax increases during the debate ([Post Politics](#)).
- The Democrats had trouble with the truth at the debate ([The Lonely Conservative](#)).
- Five lies that Hillary Clinton told at the debate ([Red State](#)).

The Republican Party's 2016 campaign

On Monday, [FiveThirtyEight](#) writes that the diploma divide is the key to the GOP presidential primary (Donald Trump currently leads polling amongst voters without one), and that this is nothing new. [Outside the Beltway](#), meanwhile, reports that Trump and Texas Senator, Ted Cruz, continue to rise in polling in the early primary states of Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina. Despite the popularity of Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, GOP voters are not really demanding a more conservative nominee than usual, [comments](#) [The Fix](#). Tuesday [sees](#) [Mischiefs of Faction](#) examine why the GOP's recent success at recruiting a large number of new candidates may not necessarily be a good thing – it may be making party polarization worse. Republican presidential candidates have their next debate on January 14th. [The Fix](#) says that the debate stage may well have shrunk considerably by then. Moving on to individual candidates in the GOP race:

Donald Trump

- After the GOP's last debate, Donald Trump has surged ahead in national polling, up to 39 percent among primary voters ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- Are we going to see a 'reverse Bradley effect' – where college educated Republicans are being shy about expressing their support – in Trump's polling? ([America blog](#))
- Accurate or not, Trump's poll lead has occurred despite the fact that he has travelled the least to campaign of all the candidates ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Despite his polling lead, half the population of the US would be embarrassed to call Trump their president ([The Fix](#))...
- ... though 44 percent of Republicans would be proud of a Trump presidency ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Apparently 41 percent of Trump's supporters want to bomb 'Agraba' – a fictional country ([Informed Comment](#)).
- Speaking of foreign policy, a Trump spokesperson said this week that the 'nuclear triad' (which Trump misunderstood at the last debate) was no good if a president was afraid to use it ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Trump this week defended Russian President Vladimir Putin (who last week complimented the billionaire), stating that 'nobody has proven that he's killed anyone' ([Post Politics](#)).
- Despite Hillary Clinton's claim in the recent Democratic debate, there is no evidence that ISIS is using videos of Donald Trump to recruit new members ([Red State](#)).
- Can Trump translate his high poll numbers into votes and win some of the early-contest states? ([Outside the Beltway](#))

- President Obama argued this week that Trump is exploiting people's fear and anger over their own economic insecurities ([Post Politics](#)).
- Who are Donald Trump's predecessors? Herbert Hoover, FDR? Or is Trump in a class of his own? ([The Federalist](#))
- This week also saw Donald Trump claim that Hillary Clinton had been 'schlonged' by Obama in the 2008 Democratic Primary – [Crooks & Liars](#) says that the comments are 'beyond the pale'.
- The media need to stop being surprised when Trump says outrageous things such as his 'schlonged' comments ([The Fix](#)).
- Also on the media – over 200,000 viewers have signed a petition demanding that CNN and MSNBC stop promoting Trump ([PoliticusUSA](#)).

Ben Carson

- Former neurosurgeon Ben Carson's drop in the polls is a gain for Donald Trump and Ted Cruz – and bad news for the GOP's establishment wing ([Political Animal](#)).
- Has Carson's impending campaign 'flameout' been planned for all along? ([Red State](#)).

Jeb Bush

- Former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush has gotten 'feistier' as he fights for a comeback in New Hampshire ([Post Politics](#)).
- Bush claimed this week that he 'hated' being the frontrunner – and now feels much better polling in 5th place ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Why do Bush's attacks on Donald Trump miss their mark? They're more about style than substance ([The Atlantic](#)).
- Bush ended up defending the Confederacy in a way this week, when discussing his removal of the Confederate flag from the Florida state capitol when he was governor ([Daily Kos](#)).



Marco Rubio



Florida Senator Marco Rubio Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

- The GOP establishment are begging Florida Senator, Marco Rubio for an early primary win in any state ([Daily Kos](#)).
- What would a path to a presidential win for Rubio actually look like? ([Red State](#))
- Rubio is not ‘tearing it up’ on the primary campaign trail, and it’s worrying some Republicans ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Rubio’s campaign has a dirty little secret – it has little time for retail politics, especially in the early states ([The Fix](#)).

Ted Cruz

- The Texas Senator this week stated that he would withdraw the US from the recently agreed Paris climate accord if he was elected ([Post Politics](#)).
- There is apparently one version of Ted Cruz who campaigns in Iowa, and another who campaigns in Manhattan ([America blog](#)).
- Why we shouldn’t assume that most people find Ted Cruz to be repulsive ([No more mister nice blog](#)).
- The *Washington Post* was in hot water this week for briefly posting online a comic which showed Cruz’s daughters as monkeys, playing on Cruz’s use of them in a political ad ([Red State](#)).
- Cruz’s response was to publish a cartoon showing the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* as Hillary Clinton’s lapdogs ([The Federalist](#)).

The rest

- Ohio Governor, John Kasich, this week trolled Donald Trump with a ‘Trump-Putin ‘16’ website, playing on the billionaire and Russian President’s recent friendliness ([Red State](#)).
- New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie is unaware of the ‘Bridgegate’ issue that has previously plagued him ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Christie also this week argued against transgender bathrooms, using it as a segway into a discussion about terrorism ([Hit & Run](#)).



Lindsey Graham Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

- South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham dropped out of the GOP presidential primary this week ([Daily Kos](#))...
- ... and it's too bad that he never had a chance at being the Republicans' presidential nominee ([The Fix](#)).
- *Roll Call's Heard on the Hill* has a [round-up](#) of Graham's wittiest moments.
- Former Iowa Governor, Mike Huckabee stated that he will drop out of the presidential race if he does not finish in the top three in Iowa in a few weeks' time ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- Kentucky Senator, Rand Paul said this week that he won't be in the next GOP candidates' debate if he's not on the main stage ([Outside the Beltway](#)).

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Monday, *Federal Eye* [reports](#) that as part of Congress' recent spending deal, the Obama administration has been allocated \$750 million to tackle the root causes of the flows of unaccompanied children across the border, the numbers of which have recently been on the increase. *Workblog* has the [news](#) that the Department of Justice will be shutting down the program of 'equitable-sharing' which allows local police forces to seize assets of citizens associated with crime. They say that the controversial program has lost \$1.2 billion.

The Atlantic says this [week](#) that Congress has had a surprisingly productive year, passing legislation covering education, infrastructure, Medicare, trade, and a budget and tax reform. *The Hill's Congress blog* [writes](#) this week that the new Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan has brought new hope for Congress as a different type of Speaker – one who is more focused on his family, and will also return the House to being the 'people's House'. *The Fix*, meanwhile, [comments](#) that while conservatives in Congress are giving Paul Ryan the benefit of the doubt, those outside the Washington DC bubble are not because of his recent compromise on the budget bill.

Moving on to the Senate, *Powerline* [wonders](#) what is going on with the Senate's Judiciary Committee, which seems to have time for hearings on the beer industry, but not on Planned Parenthood. Also on the Senate, *Red State* [writes](#) this week that the body is holding up President Obama's banking nominations.



Speaker Paul Ryan Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Monday, *Informed Comment* makes the [argument](#) that US arms sales and aid don't work to fight terrorism and war in other countries – they provoke them because it creates incentives for those countries to maintain that aid. *American Thinker*, meanwhile [says](#) that the US' national security is based on water and luck rather than any coherent strategy. *The American Interest* addresses what they call the [myth of Russia's containment](#), something that has been present in the West for more than 150 years.

Moving on to the US' armed forces, *The Hill's Congress Blog* is [troubled](#) by the state of the US Air Force's long range bomber fleet; its mainstay, the B-52 is now more than 50 years old and is desperate need of modernization. Speaking of bombers, *The American Interest* [reports](#) this week that Pentagon and Obama administration officials have stated that a B-52 flyover of the South China Sea last week was a mistake.

On Wednesday, *The Daily Signal* [argues](#) that Liberals are wrong about land mines, given that they cause few civilian casualties, and are an important weapon for the US military.

Obamacare and health policy

On Monday this week, *America blog* [reports](#) that the Food and Drug Administration has lifted its formal ban on gays donating blood – so long as they have been abstinent in the previous year. They say that while the move is a marginal improvement over the total ban, but it is still discriminatory.

Hit & Run has the [news](#) that according to new polling, support for legal abortion in the US is now at a high, with 58 percent of people feeling it should be legal in all circumstances.

Tuesday sees *Wonkblog* [write](#) on why drug spending is so high; it's partly due to increases in the price of a hepatitis C drug, and the disconnect between the most expensive drugs on Medicare not being the most expensive for patients. On Friday, *Daily Kos* takes up this [latter point](#), saying that thanks to Obamacare, fewer people have problems paying their medical bills.

The Hill's Congress blog [argues](#) this week that Congress needs to leave Medicare Part D (the prescription drug benefit) alone, which is under threat from Congressional Republicans who want to sabotage Obamacare. Speaking of Obamacare, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that this year's enrollment figures have hit 8 million, beating last year's numbers by nearly two million.

The economy and society

Remember the debate over Common Core earlier this year? *The Atlantic* [reminds](#) us that it was expected to be an important subject on the campaign trail this year, but that it seems to have since faded. *FiveThirtyEight* looks back on the recently ended No Child Left Behind federal policy, [arguing](#) that the Bush-era policy worked in the way in which it changed the way that US schools collect and use data.

After New Jersey Governor Chris Christie's comments this week, *Monkey Cage* [looks](#) into what Americans think about transgender students in locker rooms; for the most part they're still uncomfortable with the idea.

On Wednesday, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at where Americans are most likely to kill one another. Louisiana and Mississippi lead on homicide while Massachusetts and Maine have the lowest homicide rates. Friday sees *Powerline* [discuss](#) what they say is the myth of over-incarceration in the US, arguing that countries such as China and North Korea are unlikely to be reporting their prison numbers accurately.



USAF B52 refuelling over Afghanistan Credit: Lance Cheung (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

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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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