

Why 2016 House races still matter, Sanders in voter data spat with DNC, and Congress' budget deal: US national blog roundup for 12 – 18 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 over the weekend.

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President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Sunday this week, *American Thinker* [writes](#) on the occasions where President Obama's actions were 'not who we are', in reference to the 46 times that the president has used that phrase when referring to his opponents in order to take the moral high ground. *The Hill's Congress blog* [says](#) this week that over the course of his presidency, Obama has moved from 'Hope and Change' to 'Hope not', the latter characterized by the president's now-empty narrative. *The Federalist* is similarly [critical](#) of Obama, commenting that the media seem to be going out of their way to discuss the president's track record of failures, such as in the fight against ISIS.



Chicago Mayor, Rahm Emanuel. Credit: Daniel X. O'Neil (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

Moving on to the Democratic Party more generally, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Saturday that if Chicago Mayor, Rahm Emanuel ends up resigning over the 2014 shooting by police of LaQuan McDonald, then it would be a defeat for what

they call 'Clinton-era centrism' in favor of more progressive movements such as Black Lives Matter.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *Crooks & Liars* [reckons](#) that GOP insiders are still out of touch with the party's 'crazy' voters.

Elections and the road to 2016

With the Iowa Caucuses now less than two months away, presidential candidates are campaigning hard to curry favor with the state's voters. *FiveThirtyEight* takes a close [look](#) at Iowa and argues that it is not the homogenous, white, agricultural state that many presidential candidates think it is. In fact, employment in finance overtook agriculture in the 1990s, and minorities make up nearly 13 percent of the population.

On Wednesday, *The Fix* [examines](#) whether Americans really want the 2016 campaign to be focused on 'the issues' – according to a new survey, only 34 percent of people think it has so far focused on important policy debates.

Thursday sees *Sabato's Crystal Ball* look at [10 factors](#) which will determine who the next president is. These include the presidents' job approval, the state of the economy, and the dwindling number of fall states.

Roll Call's Rothenblog [writes](#) this week on why House races still matter, even though the vast majority of districts are safe. They argue that the margin matters; if the GOP lose many seats, but still have the majority, then this would strengthen the House Freedom Caucus.

The Democrats' 2016 campaign

On Sunday, *Smart Politics* [looks](#) at whether the Democratic Party might end up losing the presidency in 2016, but gain the Senate back. They say that electoral history does not rule out such an outcome; since 1913, the party which has lost the presidency has gained Senate seats nine times (though none saw a gain of five seats which the Democrats need). Senate results aside, *Informed Comment* [writes](#) that with the price of oil now at \$36 a barrel, the Democrats may have already won the White House, given that it is likely to create good feeling amongst voters as to the party's handling of the economy. *Red State* is less positive – they [say](#) that the Democrats are 'quietly terrified' of a new poll which shows that their share of the youth vote has fallen compared to where it was in 2012. *The Lonely Conservative* is [downbeat](#) about a plan from the Democratic National Convention to have taxpayers help to pay for their nominating convention in July next year.

Moving on to the candidates themselves:

- Some questions that legitimate journalists should be asking the former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, over the 2012 attack on the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya ([Townhall](#)).
- Clinton wants to tax the rich at 30 percent ([Post Politics](#)).
- Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders wants more media coverage ([The Fix](#))...
- ...and also scored endorsements from the Communications Workers of America union and the progressive organization, Democracy for America, over Hillary Clinton ([Roll Call's At the Races](#)).
- Sanders has also so far received 2 million campaign contributions, according to his aides ([Post Politics](#)).
- It's still possible for Sanders to catch Clinton in Iowa ([FiveThirtyEight](#))
- Sanders' campaign got into hot water on Friday after its staffers were found to have exploited a hole in the security of Hillary Clinton's internal voter data, which led to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) suspending the campaign's access to its voter files ([Daily Kos](#))
- Later, the Sanders campaign threatened to sue the DNC over the loss of access to its voter files ([Roll Call's At the Races](#))...

- ...but access was restored by the DNC by the end of Friday ([Crooks & Liars](#))

The Republican Party's 2016 campaign

On Saturday, *Red State* gives their [assessment](#) of the shrinking Republican Field, commenting that according to betting odds, Florida Senator Marco Rubio is the most likely to win the nomination. *The American Prospect* meanwhile [argues](#) that the GOP presidential primary is really about only one issue – how best to capitalize on voters' fear and anxiety about the future. *No More Mister Nice blog* says that despite movements in the polls the fundamentals of the primary race are unchanged – the GOP is 'still crazy' and the race is dominated by candidates who 'no sane person' would want in the White House. *Red State* meanwhile [says](#) that we pretend that polling is accurate at our peril, given how wildly polls taken at the same time can vary in their results. *The Fix* [delves](#) into who really supports the five major candidates – billionaire Donald Trump, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, retired neurosurgeon Ted Cruz, Florida Senator Marco Rubio, and former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush. Speaking of who supports who, *Red State* [looks](#) at who's currently winning Iowa's conservatives (Ted Cruz), and the state's moderates (Donald Trump).



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

Political Animal has a [warning](#) for GOP strategists – do not assume that without Obama on the ballot, black and minority turnout will fall, as the President is likely to lobby African-Americans to turnout and protect his accomplishments. On Tuesday, *The Atlantic* [wonders](#) if Congressional Republicans are ready for the GOP to retake the White House, given that so many are actually quite content with the current state of legislative gridlock.



Credit: Jeff Fillmore (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

The GOP's 5th debate

This week saw the GOP presidential primary contenders debate in Las Vegas, California. Commentary on this fifth debate was wide ranging:

- In the lead-up, *Red State* is exasperated that the 'kids table' debates of lower-ranked candidates are still going on...
- ...while *Hit & Run* has [five things](#) we should watch for in the main one.
- Are questions sourced from Twitter and Facebook making these debates any better? ([The Fix](#)).
- Post-debate, some called it fractious and fragmented ([The Atlantic](#))...
- ... but for others it was more of the same, other than Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio's debate over immigration and national security, ([Powerline](#))...
- ...while others thought it went 'off the rails' with Jeb Bush and Donald Trump's clash over foreign policy ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Still others thought that the debate was a 'nine-way' draw ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- Almost no-one attacked Donald Trump during the debate – mostly because the track record of those who do is not very good ([The Fix](#)).

- Was the US Senator for New York, Democrat Chuck Schumer, the actual winner of the debate? ([Roll Call's Hawkings Here](#))

Donald Trump

As has been the case for many months, there was a great deal of commentary from all parts of the ideological spectrum on The Donald's ongoing presidential bid:

- Why is Trump so popular? Partially because he has simple answers for everything, and because people are sick of the political establishment ([The Fix](#)).
- On the campaign trail this week Trump debuted a new method to deal with protestors at his rallies – start shouting 'Trump! Trump! Trump!' ([Post Politics](#)).
- Trump stated this week that Hillary Clinton's 'stupidity' helped to kill 'hundreds of thousands' of people ([FreakOutNation](#)).
- His attacks on Muslims have brought him more media exposure than ever since the resulting outrage causes wall-to-wall media coverage ([Monkey Cage](#))...
- ...which is one contributing factor to his polling dominance nearly matching that of Hillary Clinton's on the Democratic side ([The Fix](#)).
- Trump's poll advantage is unlikely to fade – at least until his media coverage does ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- Trump criticized the media this week for using the term 'mastermind' in reference to ISIS – a critique that may actually make sense ([The Fix](#))
- Is Trump actually an 'accidental populist' and not an ideological campaigner? ([Roll Call's Potus Operandi](#))
- When it comes to ideology, Trump is a 'textbook' moderate ([Monkey Cage](#)).
- Moderate or not, Trump has helped hate speech to go mainstream ([The Fix](#))...
- ...and his 'racially charged' advocacy of the death penalty has some problems as well ([The Atlantic](#)).



Donald Trump, credit: Michael Vadon (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

- This week Trump scotched the possibility of making a third party run for the White House if he is not the nominee – he wants to win 'the old fashioned way' ([Post Politics](#))...
- ... though some still think that the possibility of an independent Trump bid is still wide open ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Trump showed his ignorance of the US' 'nuclear triad' at the GOP debate this week ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- Why Trump leads, and why he is likely to fall ([The Federalist](#)).

- Despite Trump's popularity, only 23 percent of people say he is honest and trustworthy according to a new poll ([Townhall](#)).
- Speaking of polls, it turns out (unsurprisingly) that Trump only tweets about the polls that make him most look like he's the winner ([FiveThirtyEight](#))
- Maybe Trump's 'silent majority' is no minority at all? ([The Fix](#)).
- Trump criticized rival candidate, Ted Cruz as being a 'little bit of a maniac' in the Senate this week ([Post Politics](#)).
- How Trump's rivals in the GOP nomination race have coopted his message ([The Fix](#)).
- Russian President, Vladimir Putin, meanwhile said this week that Trump is 'bright and talented' ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- GOP voters are wrong if they believe that Trump would be their best general election nominee ([The Fix](#)).
- Though Trump could win the general election by championing bankruptcy protections for those with student loans ([The Hill's Congress blog](#)).
- According to his doctor, Trump has the best health ever ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Why the women of Iowa might end up being Donald Trump's undoing ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).

Ben Carson

- This week the retired neurosurgeon called on Congress to declare war against the Islamic State ([Post Politics](#))
- He also proposed putting troops on the border with Canada as an anti-terrorism measure ([FreakOutNation](#)).
- Carson reckons that if he wins the White House, he may only hang on to it for one term ([Post Politics](#))

Jeb Bush

- The former Governor of Florida's campaign has spent \$6.4 million on ads for every 1 point Bush has lost in the polls ([The Fix](#)).
- In mid-November, Bush predicted that by this week Donald Trump's campaign would be in decline. No such luck. ([Daily Kos](#)).
- If elected, would Bush destroy Obama's safety record? ([Crooks & Liars](#)).

Marco Rubio

- Is the junior Senator from Florida 'phoning it in'? ([No more mister nice blog](#)).
- Rubio missed an important Senate budget vote this week whilst on the campaign trail – all the while hinting that he might try to stall the budget's passage ([Daily Kos](#)).
- He also this week called for more air strikes in Syria ([Crooks & Liars](#)).



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

Ted Cruz

- According to a new state poll, Texas Senator Ted Cruz has now jumped to a lead of 10 percentage points in Iowa ([Outside the Beltway](#))...
- ...and according to a new national poll out this week he's in second place overall ([Red State](#)).

- Why Cruz is very well-positioned in the GOP race ([The Fix](#))...
- ...locking up the Evangelical establishment will have helped him as well ([America blog](#))
- Is Cruz actually a legitimate contender, or is he just this week's 'not Trump'? ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- Would a Cruz candidacy be good for the country? ([Political Animal](#))
- What lessons can Cruz learn from President Obama's presidential campaigns? ([The Atlantic](#))
- Cruz is already acting shrewdly by using 'big data' on voters ([Powerline](#)).
- A guide to what Ted Cruz really believes ([Wonkblog](#)).
- Cruz's 'doublespeak' on immigration, supporting Marco Rubio in 2013 on amnesty, but now stating he never supported it, may have come back to haunt him this week ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Why Cruz will not – and shouldn't – attack Donald Trump ([Red State](#)).

The rest

- New Jersey Governor Chris Christie this week hit out at Marco Rubio for missing votes in the Senate ([Post Politics](#))
- Is Kentucky Senator Rand Paul about to end his quest for the White House? ([Caffeinated Politics](#)).
- Paul actually caught a big break making it onto the main debate stage this week in Las Vegas – he probably shouldn't have ([The Fix](#)).
- Rand Paul appears to be the only GOP candidate who doesn't want to start 'World War III in Syria' ([Hit & Run](#)).
- Could a brokered GOP convention next year be an opening for the 2012 GOP candidate, Mitt Romney to enter the fray? ([Caffeinated Politics](#))



Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

This week the Federal Reserve announced its decision to raise interest rates for the first time in nearly a decade. *The American Prospect* [says](#) that the decision highlights a glaring weakness in conventional economic analysis – the role of power in the worker/employer relationship, which means that the former are unable to bargain for higher wages, meaning that there is relatively little inflationary pressure. *The Daily Signal*, meanwhile, [points out](#) that the Fed hasn't actually raised rates – it's only influencing the average federal funds rate.

In the wake of controversial comments made last week by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia on how black students might benefit from attending 'slower track' universities, *Political Heat* [argues](#) that Supreme Court justices should be term-limited to allow for a better flow of ideas.

Moving on to Congress, *The Atlantic* [comments](#) Tuesday that the body seems to have forgotten about the deficit, writing that a tax bill which was under discussion alongside the year-end budget bill would add up to \$800 million to the deficit if it were to be passed. *The Fix* looks at the [winners and losers](#) out of the spending deal agreed to by Congress this week – Speaker Paul Ryan comes out on top for navigating a potentially no-win scenario with little damage, while fiscal hawks are the biggest losers given that the bill increases spending by more than \$1 trillion over two years. Ryan may not get off completely unblemished – the House Freedom Caucus are likely to declare war on him over the bill [writes](#) *Daily Kos*.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Thursday, *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that President Obama is unwilling to change its strategy against ISIS despite the restrictive rules of engagement and the belief by many that ISIS is not contained.

Obamacare and health policy

Daily Kos [argues](#) this week that recent large price increases show that the market for pharmaceutical drugs has failed, and that now is the time for serious drug price reform.

In general conservatives want to repeal Obamacare – so why are some unhappy about cuts to the program? *The Atlantic* [says](#) that they are worried that changes to Obamacare will make a full repeal even harder by removing its worst parts.

The gun control debate

On Sunday, *Outside the Beltway* makes the [argument](#) that using the current no-fly watch list to bar people from buying guns (as is currently being pushed by Democrats) is not only bad policy – it's also likely to be unconstitutional.

Three years on from the Sandy Hook mass shooting federal gun laws have remained unchanged. But *Daily Kos* [says](#) that it's a different story in the states, with 39 having passed 117 new restrictions since 2012.

Wonkblog [writes](#) this week that guns are now killing as many people as cars do in the US every year – about 10.3 deaths for every 100,000 people. Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* [considers](#) a new study which suggests that mass shootings might have a contagious effect, triggering further incidents.

The economy and society

On Wednesday, *Wonkblog* [says](#) that despite its worsening fiscal crisis, Congress has not yet offered a lifeline to the territory of Puerto Rico. The territory currently lacks the option to go into bankruptcy that has been used to help ailing US cities such as Detroit.

The Daily Signal this week gives [five reasons](#) as to why we should not keep subsidizing wind and solar energy – number one is that the wind and solar industries will be fine without subsidies.

Recent weeks have been characterised by anti-Muslim sentiment in the US after calls from Donald Trump to close the border to Muslims. *The Fix* [writes](#) that we should keep in mind that this is hardly new – anti-Muslim attacks have been ranked among the most common form of religiously motivated hate crimes since 2001.

In the wake of the recent controversy over Justice Scalia's comments on African-Americans and 'slower track' universities, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at whether affirmative action creates mismatches between students and universities.

Wonkblog [looks](#) at new surveys into the use of marijuana by adults and high school students. With drug use falling,



Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia Credit: Shawn (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-2.0)



Credit: Chris Potter, stockmonkeys.com (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

they say that the case for the drug's legalisation is growing stronger.

Many have dismissed the idea of deporting the 12 million undocumented immigrants who are currently in the US as unworkable. *American Thinker* [begs to differ](#).

In 2015, 49 people were sentenced to death in the US – lower than any year since 1976, [says The Fix](#).

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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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