

## New Benghazi report, Hagel resigns and Obama's turkey 'amnesty': US national blog round up for 22 – 28 November

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 saw continuing fallout over President Obama's announcement that undocumented immigrants who have been in the country for five years or more would be exempt from deportation for the time being. On Saturday, *United Liberty* [writes](#) that the problem with the President's immigration order was in how it was issued, not in what it does. They explain that the new order would fall under the President's executive authority if its set the priorities by which immigration officials evaluated cases for deportation, rather than – as is the case – specifying which cases would be completely exempt from evaluation. On Sunday, *The Atlantic* [gives](#) six ways not to think about Obama's immigration order, from not thinking of it as a constitutional crisis, or unprecedented, to not considering it to be business as usual. *RedState* [writes](#) that the order is actually in the interest of America's billionaires, as by bringing in a large number of new low skilled, low wage laborers, wages will be forced down. On Wednesday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) on a new poll that finds that a majority of Americans support Obama's actions on immigration; with a significant number believing that he should go further.

It was Thanksgiving this week, with President Obama taking part in the annual tradition of pardoning a turkey on Wednesday. *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that Obama, whilst pardoning the turkey named 'Cheese', joked that some might call his pardon, amnesty, and that it would be his most talked about executive action this month. *The Daily Signal*, meanwhile, is less jovial, [reporting](#) that just before the holiday, the White House 'quietly' released word that it has 3,400 new regulations planned for 2015, called the 'Unified Agenda'. They say the agenda includes 23 'economically significant' rules with an estimated impact of \$100 million or more per year.

*Crooks & Liars* writes in reply to conservative commentators who have labelled President a 'nihilist' over his intent to veto any bill from Congress that would authorise the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline. They [say](#) that there are many other infrastructure projects that could be undertaken that would not have such negative environmental consequences, and that conservatives favor the pipeline because of its 'masculine' overtones.

This week also saw the announcement from a grand jury in St Louis County, Missouri, that Ferguson police officer; Darren Wilson would not be charged in the shooting of black teenager, Michael Brown in August. *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) on President Obama's statement which asked those protesting the decision to remain peaceful. In the wake of the announcement, *White House Dossier* [writes](#) that Obama's message on Ferguson is wrong, and that he should not have focused on African Americans' lack of trust in the police, and instead should have talked about economic policies that would lead to less crime in African American communities.

On Wednesday, *RedState* [reports](#) on a growing fight within the Democratic Party, after Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) blasted the party and the President for the political failures of Obamacare and the stimulus. They say that the Party should not have used its 2009 political capital on Obamacare, given that it has only helped 5 percent of the electorate.

Turning to the Republican Party, *PoliticusUSA* writes this week that Republicans are planning to 'cave' to President Obama over his executive orders on immigration. They [say](#) that the GOP's new plan to fund the government until next September, whilst only funding immigration enforcement on a short term basis is tantamount to giving the President 'everything that he wants', given that the Republican base is likely to forget about it, and move on to other issues. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the GOP is only 'one easy step' away from losing its remaining support from Latino voters. They say that given that 89 percent of Latino voters support Obama's

immigration executive orders, they should not threaten to defund the actions or try to impeach President Obama.

## Elections and the road to 2016



Senator Elizabeth Warren Credit: Newshour (CC-BY-NC 2.0)

*Crooks & Liars* writes Tuesday on the ‘winning ways’ of Massachusetts Senator, Elizabeth Warren (D). In the wake of the midterm elections earlier this month, they say that the races that Warren prioritised, New Hampshire, Oregon, Minnesota, and Michigan, saw wins for the Democrats, despite being purple states.

On Tuesday, *National Review’s The Campaign Spot* writes that the Democratic Party cannot escape Obama – something that does not bode well for the party in 2016. *The Daily Signal* echoes this with words from Obama himself, writing this week, that the President has stated that voters want ‘that new car smell’, rather than involving himself heavily in the 2016 campaign.

For many, former Secretary of State and Senator, Hillary Clinton is the most likely nominee for the Democratic Party in the 2016 presidential election. *Americablog* looks at those who say that Clinton is likely to lose given that parties have a hard time holding on to the presidency for three consecutive terms. They say that this theory is only based on eight such elections dating back to 1948 and if you look at the data back to 1856 (the start of the two-party era), then a win for the incumbent party looks more likely. Meanwhile, *Political Animal* looks at what Clinton could learn from Al Gore, the Democratic candidate in the 2000 election, who barely lost to George W. Bush. They say that Gore left his predecessor, Bill Clinton, on the side-lines in the 2000 election, but that Clinton could avoid this problem altogether by finding her own core, and then speaking from it, rather than positioning herself vis a vis Obama.

This week, *National Journal* looks at the long-shot presidential campaign of former Democratic Senator, Jim Webb. They say that Webb, who announced his candidacy late last week, is hard to imagine as a credible candidate, given his stated dislike for campaigning. They say that while he appeals to working class workers, the Democratic Party has moved on to such a degree that he is largely treated as a fringe figure.

## Government, the Beltway and Congress’ agenda

Late last Friday, the Congressional Republicans in the House Select Intelligence Committee released the Seventh Benghazi Report, into the September 11, 2012 attacks on the American facilities in Libya, which saw the killings of four Americans, including Ambassador Christopher Stephens. On Saturday, *Crooks & Liars* writes that the report says that there is no scandal over the incident, and that there was no wrongdoing on the part of any Obama administration officials. On Monday, *RedState* reports that Senator Lindsay Graham (R-SC) has reacted to the report by stating that it is “full of crap”, and that it does not exonerate the administration. *The Atlantic* writes on Wednesday that Republican House Speaker, John Boehner, is forging ahead by reappointing South Carolina Representative Trey Gowdy as head of the House Select Committee on Benghazi, which is also investigating the incident.

Over the weekend, *RedState* has some new [information](#) on another scandal that the House is looking into – the Internal Revenue Service’s (IRS) alleged targeting of conservative groups. They say that investigators have found the data for 30,000 additional emails sent by former IRS official Lois Lerner, which are relevant to their search.

On Monday, *National Journal* [writes](#) on the Senate Intelligence Committee’s report into the CIA’s ‘enhanced interrogation’ techniques used during the George W. Bush administration. They say that while Senators and their staffs have insisted that an executive summary of the report’s findings will be released before the Republicans take over the Senate early next year, only a few weeks remain for this to happen. They say that the White House may be purposefully stalling on approving the report’s release in order to protect those it criticizes.

Last week saw the House file a lawsuit in federal district court challenging the Obama administration’s unilateral actions over the Affordable Care Act. *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at whether the suit will be successful, writing on Sunday that the court may well rule against it, if it finds that the House lacks standing to bring it, on the grounds that it has not been injured and the actions are not capable of being redressed by a court.

Republicans in Congress are now looking for ways to effectively respond to President Obama’s immigration executive order last week. *The Daily Signal* [gives](#) five ways that Congress could push back, including passing measures to block funding, passing a ‘sense of Congress resolution’, which would express its opposition to Obama’s action, or file a new, or join the existing lawsuit against the President. *The Atlantic* looks at another push back from Texas GOP Senator Ted Cruz, to refuse to confirm the president’s nominees until Obama backs down. They [write](#) that this tactic would keep the current Attorney General, in office. The problem with this for Cruz is that he doesn’t like Holder very much.



Ted Cruz Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Still on the President and Congress, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) on Tuesday that Obama has threatened to veto Congress’ latest plan to give corporations a \$400 billion tax cut. They say the deal which has been negotiated by the present Democratic Majority Leader, Harry Reid and Senate Republicans. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Wednesday that given Obama’s veto threat, the tax package deal is effectively dead, and that Harry Reid was likely for the deal because it would have permanently extended the American Opportunity Tax Credit, which would provide relief for those with student loans.

The big news this week was the announcement on Monday morning that the Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, was to resign after serving for less than two years. *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that he is leaving because he has struggled to fit with President Obama’s close circle, and that he struggled to remain on-message. *The Atlantic* [meanwhile](#) looks at who may replace Hagel – the top contenders being Michele Flournoy (the CEO of American Security, and former Pentagon insider) and Ashton Carter (former Deputy Secretary of Defense). Flournoy removed herself from the running later in the week, however. *The Federalist*, on the other hand, [wonders](#) why Obama actually appointed Hagel in the first place.

On Tuesday, in the wake of the Grand Jury’s vote not to indict Darren Wilson over the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri, *Wonkblog* has a fascinating [chart](#) that shows that federal grand juries indict 99.99 percent of the time. They say the tension with this fact is that state level Grand Juries tend not to indict police officers. On Tuesday, *Daily Kos* [points out](#) that twenty years after being told to count the number of shootings by police, the Department of Justice still does not collect this information in a meaningful and useful way.

**Foreign policy, defense and trade**

On Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that President Obama has ‘quietly’ decided this week that American forces will remain in a combat role in Afghanistan until after 2014. They say that the military pushed for a broader mission that would allow American troops to attack the Taliban and other militants, and that they got what they wanted with no public debate or even a public acknowledgement of the change in policy. *The American Interest*, meanwhile, [makes the case](#) for a greater participation for Congress in American foreign policy, writing that in the release of the Benghazi investigation report discussed above, brings home that the incident was a consequence of a much larger policy failure, something that the narrow investigations missed. They say that Congress needs to rethink its foreign policy oversight and take back some its power in this area from the executive branch.

*Hit & Run* this week [wonders](#) if anyone actually wants to be the face of President Obama’s military policy, after Michèle Flournoy took herself out of the running for Chuck Hagel’s job as Secretary of Defense. They say that the administration’s reputation for centralized authority may put people off. *The American Thinker* also weighs in on what Hagel’s departure means for Obama’s defense policy. They [write](#) that his resignation reveals Obama’s underestimation of the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Hagel had always show much more concern over the threat posed by Islamic state, and considered using ground troops to be an option, whole President Obama ‘avoided’ the possibility.

### Obamacare and health policy

On Wednesday, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that almost half a million people have signed up to for Obamacare after the first week of new enrollment for 2015. They say that this puts paid to Republican criticisms, and that they have yet to offer a viable alternative. *Wonkblog*, meanwhile [looks](#) at what has improved on the Healthcare.gov website since the first enrollment period last year, and what still needs fixing. They say that the website now better displays customers out of pocket obligations, but that it is also still hard for users to filter through the many plan options.

*The Daily Signal* [writes](#) this week that former Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska’s insistence when the Affordable Care Act was being negotiated that states be allowed to run their own exchanges may well come back to haunt him, and Obamacare itself. The Supreme Court will next year take up a lawsuit which challenges the subsidies for state run exchanges. If the suit succeeds, then Obamacare as we know it would be ‘obliterated’. Lawsuit or not, the states are now already struggling to pay for their healthcare exchanges, according to *Hit & Run*. They [say](#) that some of the federal grants provided to the states are about to run out, and the authorities do not know how the ongoing operations will be funded. Vermont, for example, could face an \$20 million shortfall by the end of the year.

### The economy and society

On Saturday, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that some Americans are about to get ‘filthy rich’, whilst other will only get ‘filthy’ when the Keystone XL pipeline is finally approved. They say that 2,600 miles of pipeline have already been built, and that in the new Congress, the Republicans will likely use their majority to ‘bulldoze’ approval through.

*Wonkblog* looks at a new report out this week which has found that [war](#) costs the U.S. more than smoking or obesity.

On Wednesday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that the riots in Ferguson, Missouri this week are a repeat



Credit: 350 PDX (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

of past disturbances, such as 1992's Los Angeles riots. They say that unless government enacts policies that will give the rioters hope and address day to day injustices, riots such as this week's will continue to occur. *Hit & Run*, meanwhile, [writes](#) that the government in Washington has done little since the first Ferguson riots in August to scale back its role in providing military equipment to law enforcement agencies.

In the last week, much has been made of previous immigration amnesties under Presidents Reagan and Bush I. *Wonkblog* [looks](#) into what happened to the 2.7 million undocumented immigrants who gained legal status under a 1986 law. They say that the little that we do know points to wage gains for the immigrants and that as many as 1/3<sup>rd</sup> became naturalized citizens.

### **And finally...**

Ahead of 'Black Friday', *The Atlantic* [has](#) 11 economic lessons to make you a smarter shopper – one of the best is, "Beware "Good Deals" on Items You Know Nothing About."

*The Daily Signal* [delves](#) into the White House tradition of turkey pardoning ahead of Thanksgiving, which began with President George H.W Bush in 1989.

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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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