

Obama's immigration agenda and the GOP's limited response, and can Biden be the McConnell whisperer?: US national blog round up for 15 – 21 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, blog commentary was dominated by reaction anticipating President Obama's announcement on Thursday night, that he would be taking Executive Action to prevent the deportation of up to 5 million undocumented immigrants. On Saturday, *RedState* [writes](#) that immigration reform is Obama's 'payoff' to far left activists which include wealthy liberal foundations. On Monday, *American Thinker* [gives ten arguments](#) against Obama's Executive Action, including that it might trigger future waves of illegal immigration, and by making illegal aliens eligible to work, that will take jobs away from other working-class Americans.

Crooks & Liars [defends](#) President Obama's likely move on immigration reform, citing similar Executive Orders from Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, which extended amnesty to the spouses and minor children of immigrants in 1986 and 1989. *The Atlantic* counters this point, writing that Reagan and Bush's Executive Orders offer no precedent to what is occurring now. They [say](#) that both presidents acted in conjunction with Congress, whilst Obama intends to "overpower and overmaster a recalcitrant congress". Meanwhile, *The Federalist* [writes](#) that Obama's executive overreach is actually more dangerous than his proposed amnesty. They say that Obama's actions to circumvent the legislative process are a "perfect definition of executive abuse".

Ahead of Obama's address on Thursday evening, the *White House Dossier* writes that it is a 'sad day', arguing that the country is 'finished' if it becomes one where the chief executive can ignore laws, and do as they please. *The Daily Signal* [reacts](#) to the speech itself, saying that while Obama called for the country's broken immigration system to be fixed, this is a straw man – the system is not broken. They say that the biggest problem is a lack of law enforcement, and that Obama should work with Congress rather than pursuing an 'amnesty-first' policy.

On Tuesday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that Obama's agenda, which includes immigration reform, a veto on legislation which would authorize the Keystone XL pipeline, and reaching a nuclear deal with Iran, is threatening to divide the Democratic Party. They say that these policies are far to the left, and seem to ignore the GOP's gains in the recent midterm elections. *The American Prospect* [takes](#) a more general look at the Democratic Party this week, writing that the Party can win back the white working class and increase its turnout among blacks and Latinos. They say that if the Democrats embrace the \$15 minimum wage, then this will attract both groups, especially after red states passed measures increasing the rate in the recent midterm elections.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *The Federalist* [writes](#) that Conservatives are fighting a battle for survival against Obama's Executive Orders. They say that Obama's actions are designed to court Hispanic voters, and that the GOP should not allow the issue of illegal immigration to control the Right's message to that group.

On Sunday, *Crooks & Liars* [looks](#) at comments made by Senate Al Franken (D-MN), who stated in a recent news interview that Senator Ted Cruz's (R-TX) recent comments on net neutrality are "completely wrong", after Cruz said that net neutrality would be the equivalent of Obamacare for the internet. Staying on Senator Cruz, *National Journal* writes on Wednesday that the Texas Senator wants the Republican Congress to fight President Obama on immigration. They [say](#) that Cruz has called for Congress to stop the President at all costs given his 'lawlessness' by not confirming a single judicial nominee outside of national security provisions.

Elections and the road to 2016

On Monday, *RedState* [looks](#) at how the Republican Party was able to take advantage of Twitter to 'outsmart' campaign finance laws that prohibit coordination during the recent midterm elections. They say that the Party was able to share internal polling data with outside groups via twitter accounts with names like @brunogianelli44, named after the fictional character on the television program, *The West Wing*. *Roll Call's At the Races* [looks](#) at Ann Kirkpatrick – the Democratic 'survivor', who won her election race in Arizona's 1st District in this year's midterms.



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

They say she expanded her margin from 2012, despite some predictions that she would lose badly. The *Monkey Cage*, meanwhile, [looks](#) at whether or not the Republican Party was able to make inroads with the Latino vote in the midterms. They say that while the GOP have claimed that Latino voters had a large preference for Republicans in Texas, Kansas and Georgia, the exit poll methods used to determine these numbers are suspect.

Looking [ahead](#) to the 2016 presidential election, *National Journal* describes a number of staff changes that show that campaigns are already gearing up. They say that this week Senator Rand Paul's (R-KY) campaign had poached Ted Cruz's digital strategist Vincent Harris.

On the Democrats' side, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that while Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren may not want to run for president in two years' time, the party needs her to. They say that Warren's position on the left of the party makes her well suited to make the contrasts between the GOP and the Republican Party apparent. This week saw discussion on four other potential Democratic candidates – none of which were Hillary Clinton, the former Senator and Secretary of State which many see as the party's heir apparent. On Monday, *National Journal* [writes](#) that the New York Mayor, Bill de Blasio is being floated by some as a potential candidate, but that this makes no sense. They write that de Blasio's 'hard-left agenda' is not realistic for the rest of the country, and that he lacks the experience necessary for a successful bid. Meanwhile *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) that the Independent Senator for Vermont, Bernie Sanders, has warned that the U.S. may have reached a 'tipping point' where only billionaires can influence who becomes president. They say that Sanders is currently travelling the country in order to determine if he has enough support for a presidential run.

On Thursday, *National Review's The Campaign Spot* [reports](#) that the former one-term Senator for Virginia, Jim Webb, has announced that he will be running for President in 2016. They note that he found his six years as a Democratic Senator as 'boring'. *Political Animal* looks at the growing coverage of the soon to be former Governor of Maryland, Martin O'Malley. They [say](#) while O'Malley is likely to hold 2016-ambitions, he will need to overcome what many see as his responsibility for the recent defeat of his designated successor, Anthony Brown, in Maryland's gubernatorial election.

Moving to the potential Republican 2016 presidential field, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at Senator Rob Portman of Ohio, who they say has a great deal of Washington experience, would also struggle with name recognition. On Thursday, *Political Animal* looks at Wisconsin Governor, Scott Walker's presidential plans. They [say](#) that Walker is getting a 'spike' in his 'vanilla persona' in order to appeal more widely, by introducing more punitive legislation in Wisconsin such as cutting property taxes and requiring drug tests for welfare beneficiaries.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Saturday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that while Democrats lost the midterm election, President Obama still controls the regulatory agencies. They say that there are 124 more rules in the pipeline for agencies, which will impose costs of at least \$100 million each annually on the private sector. These include rules around Dodd-Frank, Obamacare, and for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

On Tuesday, *United Liberty* reports on infighting within House Democrats after their midterm defeat two weeks ago. They [say](#) that House Democrats are taking out their frustrations on Minority Leader, Nancy Pelosi, as illustrated by a procedural disagreement with Illinois Democrat Tammy Duckworth who had her request to vote by proxy (because of her pregnancy) refused.

Could Vice President Joe Biden be the 'McConnell whisperer'? *Roll Call's Hawkings Here* [thinks](#) that it might be possible. He writes on Monday that the White House may choose to deploy Biden, given his previous negotiating successes, to make meaningful agreements with the soon to be Senate Majority leader over the next two years of Obama's presidency. Meanwhile, *The Hill's Congress Blog* looks at what Washington should focus on next year. They [say](#) that healthcare reforms and energy reforms which limit regulation and maximize personal freedom and economic growth should be the priority. One somewhat



Vice President Joe Biden and Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell Credit: [McConnell Center](#) (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-ND-2.0)

unexpected consequence of the midterm elections earlier this month was the legalization of marijuana for recreational purposes in Washington DC. *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that the newly Republican Congress looks likely to remain silent on the issue, and not block implementation of the measure, which it has the power to do.

On Wednesday, *Roll Call's Five by Five* [reports](#) that a vote in the Senate which would ban the National Security Agency's (NSA) practice of bulk collection of telephone records failed this week. They say that with the Senate about to become much more Republican, it may take another round of revelations about the NSA's programs to get legislative momentum going once again. Staying on surveillance issues, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) this week that lame-duck Colorado Senator Mark Udall should use his remaining weeks in the Senate to reveal the abuses of the CIA and the NSA, as he would not face legal consequences whilst still in Congress.

This week's announcement on immigration has brought with it further concerns over Congressional gridlock and the potential for a repeat of last year's government shutdown. On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [reports](#) on the GOP's appointment of 'Obama's next pain in the butt', in the form of Representative Jason Chaffetz of Utah. They say that the Republican will be the new face of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and is a staunch critic of Obama. The Democrats may also be taking an obstructionist turn, reports *PoliticoUSA*. They [say](#) that Liberal Democrats in the Senate have formed a 'hell no' caucus to block legislation such as the Keystone XL pipeline, approval of which was blocked on Tuesday evening. For *National Review's The Campaign Spot*, it is President Obama who is now Washington's [most powerful obstructionist](#). They say that while the Republican Party has promised to pass legislation that reflects the will of the people, such as the repeal of Obamacare, Obama is essentially refusing to govern by pushing his own agenda.

On Tuesday, *Talking Points Memo* [writes](#) that many House Republicans are pushing for a head on confrontation with the president over his immigration Executive Order which may lead to a government shutdown. They say that Republican Senators, including Jeff Sessions of Alabama are considering adding a rider to a long-term

government funding bill which would block Obama's immigration actions. *RedState*, [meanwhile](#), writes that Obama may be looking to cut a deal with Senate GOP leader, Mitch McConnell, to achieve bipartisan agreement in his final two years as president. They warn against this, saying that the GOP majority must avoid bipartisanship just for the sake of being seen to be 'doing something'. On a more positive note, *Wonkblog* [reminds](#) us that there is actually not a great deal between the two parties on issues such as immigration reform and the Keystone XL pipeline. They [say](#) that much of the disagreements on the issues are about politics, rather than the issues themselves.

In July House Speaker John Boehner floated the idea of suing President Obama to challenge his unilateral decision to delay Obamacare's employer mandate. This week the House hired their third lawyer to pursue the lawsuit, Jonathan Turley of George Washington Law School. The *Monkey Cage* [writes](#) that Congress faces a challenge in taking this legal route because it must demonstrate that the executive action has harmed Congress, and that it cannot remedy the situation without involving the courts.

Just ahead of Obama's announcement on immigration, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that the Republican Party's options in response are limited and potentially non-existent. They say that the agency largely responsible for enacting the order, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, is largely funded through fees, making it very hard to defund with an appropriations bill. A lawsuit, as discussed above, is likely to be ineffectual, meaning that the only options have are pursuing impeachment or considering a comprehensive immigration bill.

PoliticusUSA [writes](#) this week that the fight to legalize gay marriage may be on its way to the Supreme Court. They say that if they accept a case filed on Monday from a gay couple in Michigan, they should invalidate the decision of the U.S. South Circuit Court of Appeals which upheld bans on gay marriage in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

On Monday, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the Department of Justice and Congress are 'begging' one another to reform marijuana laws, and that despite this, nothing has changed. They say that the fact that neither have moved to change the classification of the drug as Schedule 1 substance show just how ineffective Washington has now become.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Saturday, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that President Obama has pledged \$3 billion to the United Nations' Green Climate Fund, meaning that Congress will now have to appropriate the money – something that seems unlikely in the current political environment. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that Obama is following in the footsteps of President George W. Bush, whose administration championed international climate finding measures, which makes it amazing that the current Congress may try to derail the promised funding.

Outside the Beltway [writes](#) this week that Congress has yet to take steps to authorize President Obama's war against the forces of Islamic State in the Middle East, and until it does, the action is illegal. They say the original authorization of the use military force which was passed in 2001 in response to the September 11 attacks no longer applies as ISIS is no longer connected to al-Qaeda.

Ahead of the November 24th deadline for negotiations between Iran and the UN Security Council and Germany, *Informed Comment* [looks](#) at whether or not the U.S. should accept a 'good but not perfect' nuclear deal. They say that such a 'good deal' would give the world assurances that Iran was not



Two U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle aircraft fly over northern Iraq Sept. 23, 2014, after conducting airstrikes in Syria. (DoD photo by Senior Airman Matthew Bruch, U.S. Air Force/Released)

interested in producing nuclear weapons, while at the same time allowing it to have a viable civilian nuclear enrichment program.

Wonkblog [writes](#) on Tuesday on a report that shows that after 13 years and trillions spent, terrorist attacks across the world are rising – from less than 1,500 in 2000 to nearly 10,000 in 2013. They say that U.S. foreign policy has played a large role in making the problem worse.

Obamacare and health policy

Open enrollment for Obamacare plans for 2015 is now open, and with it the President's signature healthcare reform is back in the limelight. On Monday, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that the smooth second start for the Obamacare website, Healthcare.gov, which saw 100,000 people submit applications during its first weekend, has been interrupted by 'Grubergate' – the controversy over the comments from former Obama administration health adviser, Jonathan Gruber, that recently surfaced, where he states that the healthcare law passed because of the "stupidity of the American voter". Meanwhile, *Americablog* [writes](#) that new poll shows that people are 'mad' about Obamacare and hate it, but that another shows that those who actually use it, view it quite positively. The *Monkey Cage* this week [reports](#) that Obamacare's premiums are now rising, but that those who are critical of this need to remember an important bit of historical context – these increases are no higher than those premium increases on plans provided by employers.

With Obamacare's apparent successes, many in the Republican camp are beginning to advocate for the healthcare reform to be fixed rather than repealed. *RedState* [argues](#) strongly against this, calling it a 'strategic retreat', and writes that the GOP must keep up the pressure, especially given their renewed midterm mandate. The Republican Party received some further ammunition against Obamacare this week when it came to light that the Obama administration had included dental plans in its Obamacare enrollment numbers. They [say](#) that without the 380,000 plans, the administration actually missed its target enrollment of 7 million.

During the midterm campaign, some Republican candidates adopted the policy position that birth control pills should be sold over the counter. On Tuesday, *FiveThirtyEight* [writes](#) that offering such contraception over the counter would not actually make it cheaper, as it would no longer be covered by health insurance.

The economy and society

On Wednesday, *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that while most Americans oppose Obama taking unilateral executive action on immigration, they also support immigration reform. They write that most people would prefer that the President and Congress work together on the issue. They say that the White House is hoping that the public will rally around the President over the substance of the policy and its implementation with Congress. Meanwhile, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at how many immigrants will actually be affected by Obama's executive action. They say that the total number would be around 4.15 million, plus the children and families of those who will no longer be deported.

This week *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at employment in the U.S., writing that only six in ten Americans who are eligible to work are actually working, and that 2.2 million adults have 'simply given up' looking for a job. Perhaps related to this is another sad statistic reported by *Daily Kos* – that one in thirty children in the U.S. experience [homelessness](#). On Tuesday, *Hit & Run* [reports](#) that most states are projecting that their prison populations will continue to grow – likely by around 3 percent, on average, to 2018. They say that while the prison population is growing, state imprisonment rates are remain steady or are in decline. In other state-related news, on Friday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that a new study has shown that state governments are in a \$4.7 trillion pension hole, and that the average state pension plan is only 36 percent funded.

And finally...

Worried about the effects of marijuana on your children? You probably shouldn't be, [reports](#) *Wonkblog*. They say that a child is 136 times more likely to be poisoned by diaper cream than by marijuana.

The Atlantic [looks](#) at new research that finds that the presence of a dog in a newspaper story will mean that it is read by many more people.

This week *Wonkblog* looks at America's [favorite really bad movies](#) – topping the list are *The Day after Tomorrow* and *300*.

Featured image: President Barack Obama signs an Executive Order in the Oval Office, 2012. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

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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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