

Obama's controversial budget, America's 'new normal' of war, and GOP vs vaccination: US national blog round up for 31 January – 6 February

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

On Monday, President Obama delivered his penultimate budget to Congress, outlining his spending priorities for 2016. Ahead of time, *PoliticusUSA* writes that Obama's budget is setting up a battle with the Republican-controlled Congress as it contains measures such as higher taxes on the wealthy and business, and increased education and child care spending. *Red State* responds to the new budget Monday, stating that it indicates that Obama 'loves shutdowns' – referring to the fact that every one of the items, including rolling back the spending sequester is a non-starter with Congress. *National Journal* is more specific, giving seven things in the budget that aren't going to happen, including \$1 billion in spending on countries in Central America to root out the causes of illegal immigration, and free community college. *White House Dossier* meanwhile writes that the budget is 'utterly irresponsible', given that it ignores the \$18 trillion debt and the deficit. *The Lonely Conservative* echoes this, writing that Obama will not accept any budget that does not increase spending, and that he wants discretionary spending to rise by 6 percent. *Hit & Run* has a roundup of Obama's 'ten new taxes' from the budget which include a hike in capital gains tax and a doubling of taxes on tobacco. *The Daily Signal* is a bit more equivocal in its coverage; they look at what Obama got right and wrong in his budget. On Tuesday, *Townhall* says that the budget is part of President Obama's 'mad dash to the finish line' in trying to push his statist agenda before his term ends.

On Sunday, *The Daily Signal* writes that the Alaska drilling ban announced by President Obama in his recent State of the Union address was not really motivated by a desire to protect wildlife, given the relatively small footprint of modern oil extraction techniques. They say that it's more about Obama's radical climate-change agenda that aims to stop all domestic oil and gas drilling.

Hit & Run looks at Obama's clemency record, writing Wednesday that it is still one of the worst ever, at 64, and that they tend to focus on people who have already served long sentences, rather than younger recipients who could make better use of their shortened sentences.

PoliticusUSA reports on some changes in Obama's team this week, writing that two high-ranking advisers, Jennifer Palmieri and Dan Pfeiffer, are leaving his administration, with the former lined up to serve as Hillary Clinton's communications director for her putative presidential campaign.

Political Animal looks more generally at the progressive movement, saying that President Obama's strategy of using executive orders to get things done has confused many on the left. They say that Obama's approach – which has been several years in the making – is now finally paying off.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *Wonkblog* reckons that conservatives would do well to get behind Obama's push for universal preschool, as announced in this week's budget. They say that Pre-K education is an efficient investment for public money, and returns include higher college graduation rates, greater earnings and less criminal activity. Turning to the GOP in Congress, *Political Animal* has a premonition of a GOP 'train wreck' over factions in the party's disagreements over what to do if the Supreme Court rules that the tax credits for Obamacare federal exchanges in states that have not set up their own are invalid. *Daily Kos* echoes this, writing that even five years after the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, the Republican Party still has no plans for either health care or tax reform. On Wednesday, *Crooks & Liars* carries the unusual news that North Carolina

Senator, Thom Tillis has suggested that food businesses should not be able to force their workers to wash their hands after going to the bathroom.

Elections and the road to 2016

Daily Kos looks ahead to the 2016 midterm elections, [wondering](#) if we are seeing the death of split-ticket voting. They say that results from last year's midterms show that most House districts are a straight-ticket affair, aligning with the presidential vote. On Monday, *Americablog* accuses the Republican Party of trying to rig elections, though legally. They [say](#) that since their midterm election victories, the party has introduced bills in the Democratic-leaning states they control to break up the state's electoral votes by congressional district.

National Journal [looks](#) at the Democrats' plans for the 2016 congressional elections, writing that for Senate races, they are turning to veterans such as 73-year old former Governor, Ted Strickland who may take on Republican Senator Rob Portman in Ohio. *Roll Call's Rothenblog* meanwhile [writes](#) that in order to win a House majority, the party might need to lose the White House.

Moving on to the ongoing speculation about the 2016 presidential election, *National Journal* [wonders](#) whether or not former Senator and Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, widely considered by many to be the Democratic front-runner, will face the usual obstacles and setbacks on her way to the Democratic nomination.

Last week saw the withdrawal of the Republicans' 2012 nominee, Mitt Romney, from the 2016 race. *Political Animal* [pours cold water](#) on the notion that Romney's departure is a triumph for the former Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush. They say that both Jeb Bush, and the other establishment candidate, New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie, are struggling in recent polling, with Wisconsin Governor, Scott Walker moving to the head of the field. *National Journal* takes a close look at Jeb Bush this week, and at whether or not he will be able to [rebrand the 'Bush' name](#), given how tarnished it became

during the two terms in office of his brother, George W. Jeb Bush's rebranding attempt was in evidence this week as he gave a speech on Wednesday in Detroit, which *Wonkblog* [says](#) directly addressed the economic inequality facing many in America's middle class. *The Atlantic* meanwhile wonders if Jeb Bush is the [GOP's version of Obama](#), given his biculturalism.

On Monday, *The American Prospect* [reports](#) that Kentucky Senator Rand Paul has attacked Jeb Bush for 'hypocrisy' over his opposition to the legalization of marijuana, given Bush's use of the drug in his youth. They say that Paul's comments are a portent that anyone running for president is going to have to come up with a clear answer on the issue of marijuana legalization. *National Journal* [says](#) on Tuesday that Paul can't win the Republican nomination due to his non-interventionist foreign policy views, which are out of step with an American public worried about ISIS and Russia. His pants haven't helped either, [write Daily Kos](#).

This week, the Scott Walker 'boom' continued with the Governor of Wisconsin continuing his rise towards the head of the 2016 pack for the Republicans. *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that Walker himself stated in an interview this week that when asked if he would run for president, that he 'wouldn't be against me on anything'. *Daily Kos* is not so sure,



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Jeb Bush Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-2.0)

writing on Saturday that the jury is 'still out' on whether or not Walker should be taken seriously as a presidential candidate. *Outside the Beltway* is similarly skeptical about Walker; while he has surged in Iowa polling after his speech last week, winning the Iowa Caucus has historically not been a great predictor of who will win the nomination for the GOP. *Crooks & Liars* also thinks that Walker may have peaked too early. *Townhall* damns Scott Walker with faint praise, writing this week that he is a 'vanilla' candidate, and that his policies are the most acceptable to most people, though he's not many people's favorite.

Finally, *Roll Call's Rothenblog* has a helpful roundup of the [Republican presidential field](#) – they say that it's not your parent's or grandparent's field.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Tuesday, *Daily Kos* writes that despite the increase in the representation of women in Congress (now at 100), they wield less influence due to the GOP now being in charge. Of 21 House committees, only one is headed by a woman.

Tuesday saw a vote in the House to repeal Obamacare – the fourth time the GOP have tried to do so. *The Daily Signal* says that this time is different since with a Republican controlled Senate, the party can attack Obamacare on their own terms, via a reconciliation bill that would only need 51 votes to head to the President's desk. Staying in the Senate, *Crooks & Liars* reports on the activities of Ron Johnson (R-WI), who is now the head of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs. They say that Johnson is keen to focus on immigration, despite having no idea how to secure the border. With security issues in mind, *The Daily Signal* says that Senate Democrats have blocked debate over legislation to fund the Department of Homeland Security, which faces a funding gap at the end of the month. They report that 44 Democrats and 2 Independents this week voted against proceeding to debate a House bill that would fund the Department because it also defunds President Obama's recent executive actions on immigration. *National Journal*, meanwhile, looks at Senator Rand Paul has been getting around the Senate's social media rules in order to troll other presidential candidates.

Net neutrality has been on the agenda in Washington DC for some time now. *Daily Kos* writes this week that the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Tom Wheeler, has just announced that he will propose that broadband be reclassified under Title II of the Telecommunications Act which will mean rules that ban prioritization and throttling of content and services – the so-called 'two speed internet'.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Monday, *Informed Comment* looks at America's 'new normal' of war, and gives seven reasons why U.S. wars persist. These include the privatization of war, the push to 'support our troops' no matter what, and the definition of the world as a global battlefield.

On Thursday, *Townhall* explains why America should not give military assistance to rebels fighting against Russia in Ukraine. They say that such assistance would do little good, be expensive and that Ukraine is outside the limits of U.S. power.

Obamacare and health policy

On Saturday, *Red State* says that the White House is preparing for the fallout from the 'Obamacare tax' that will be levied on people if they do not register for health insurance by February 15th. They say that the tax filing season may generate new anger as uninsured consumers learn that they must pay. According to *FiveThirtyEight*, Latino enrollment into Obamacare is critical for the program's success. They say that prior to the introduction of Obamacare, Latinos accounted for more than 30 percent of the uninsured. They say that while data is sketchy, the Latino share may be around ten percent.

With the House voting to repeal Obamacare this week, *The Daily Signal* gives five reasons why the President's signature health care reform policy should be completely repealed, including that it includes the expansion of the broken Medicaid program, that millions remain uninsured, and its tax credits are overly complicated. *Daily Kos* reports this week on a brief sent to the Supreme Court by public health scholars that states that there will be thousands of deaths if it strikes down the subsidies currently available to people getting insurance via federal

exchanges in states that refused to set up their own.

This week saw a quickly unfolding debate over the safety of vaccines in the wake of an increase in cases of the measles, most prominently in Disneyland California. [PoliticoUSA reports](#) that New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie (and potential GOP presidential candidate), has stated that he feels that parents should have a choice about vaccinating their children, whilst visiting London, UK. [Hit & Run says](#) that Christie has walked back his comments as the week progresses, saying that there is no question that children should be vaccinated. Senator Rand Paul (KY) similarly came under criticism this week for his comments, [reported](#) by *National Journal*, that vaccination was a personal decision. President Obama, on the other hand, this week urged parents to ignore conspiracy theories and have their kids vaccinated, [writes Daily Kos](#). *United Liberty*, meanwhile [chews over](#) whether people who do not vaccinate their children should be punished, given the public health implications of not being vaccinated. They conclude that so long as they behavior only may cause harm, then it should not be prosecuted. *Wonkblog* looks at what is [driving the current skepticism](#) for vaccination – apparently it's young adults.

The economy and society

On Tuesday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at the relationship between segregation and poverty. They say that one of the most effective ways to improve outcomes for those who are poor is to move them to new neighborhoods.

FiveThirtyEight gives a [sobering picture](#) of long term unemployment in the U.S. this week, writing that while the economy is improving, nearly 3 million Americans have still been out of work for more than six months. They argue that the current system of unemployment benefits no longer fits the new reality of unemployment. The picture isn't exactly rosy for those that do have jobs, either, explains *National Review's The Campaign Spot*. They [say](#) that only 44 percent of U.S. adults work 30 hours a week or more and get a regular paycheck.

And finally...

In honor of Groundhog Day, *Wonkblog* [maps](#) three decades' worth of groundhog forecasts. Turns out that Punxsutawney Phi got it more right than wrong, on average.

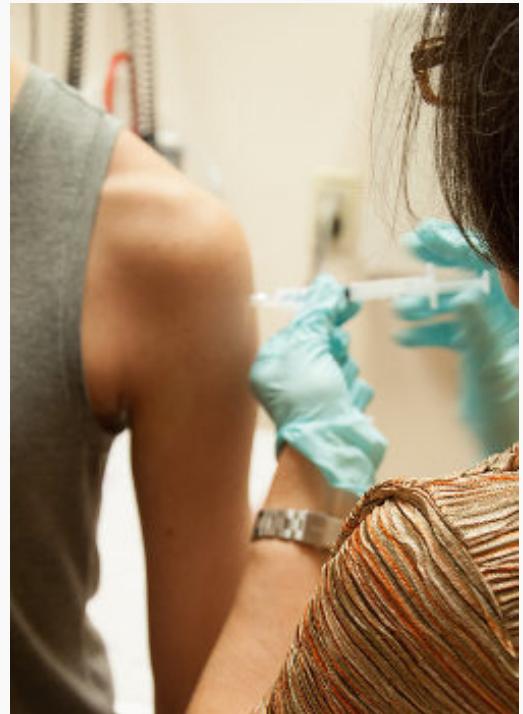
Remember Ted Cruz reading 'Green Eggs and Ham' in the Senate in 2013? Well the GOP is still at it, writes *FreakoutNation*, who [report](#) that a state Senator in Alaska has been making a 'Republicnized' reading from the Dr Seuss book.

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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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