

Speaker Boehner's no squish, Warren's stump speech, and Harvard's healthcare woes: US national blog round up for 3 – 9 January

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 Sunday, *PoliticusUSA* [calls](#) on President Obama to lift more than 10 million American workers into the middle class by increasing the threshold for salaried workers to earn overtime pay. They say that by making an executive order to this effect, Obama would do more for workers than increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

With the new Republican dominated Congress in session this week, it took very little time for President Obama to threaten his first veto of 2015. *The Daily Signal* [argues](#) that the Obama's statement on Tuesday that he would veto any bill that would approve the Keystone XL oil pipeline is a threat to "jobs, energy and common sense". *Wonkblog*, [meanwhile](#) has a look back at President Obama's vetoes so far – all two of them.

Looking at the Democratic Party more generally, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) on Thursday that the populist wing of the party, exemplified by Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts needs to acknowledge that while many Americans are angry at corporate elites, few are in favor of any new government moves to redistribute wealth. This week also saw dissension within the House Republican Conference in the lead up to the election of the Speaker. *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the Democrats should back John Boehner as Speaker, as it would neutralize the threat of a Tea Party challenge if he was to bring more bi-partisan compromises to the floor.

On Thursday, *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at the Republican Party's relationship with Latino voters. They say that in putting down two bills that they hope will curb President Obama's November executive action on immigration, the GOP are likely to alienate a generation of Latino voters.

Elections and the road to 2016

This week *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at how the Democrats may be able to regain control of the Senate in 2016. While they have only 10 seats to defend, compared with the GOP's 24, it will still be an uphill battle since several 'brand-name' Senators such as Marco Rubio will need to be defeated.

Moving to the 2016 presidential race, *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) this week that Independent Vermont Senator, Bernie Sanders, has outlined his progressive vision as he eyes up a potential run. The issues that he is most keen to tackle include income inequality, campaign funding, health care, and climate change. *Wonkblog* [meanwhile](#) has some insights into what Elizabeth Warren's stump speech might be if she was to run for president in 2016.

On the Republican side, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that former Governor of Arkansas, Mick Huckabee has announced this week that he is leaving his show on Fox News, ahead of a decision on running for president. *Daily Kos*, [meanwhile](#), says that former Florida Governor Jeb Bush is quickly becoming a strong force among likely GOP candidates for 2016. They [say](#) that Bush has announced new political action committees, and is aggressively courting donors. *Roll Call's Rothenblog* [looks](#) at whether or not Bush can win his party's nomination, writing that his familiar name is both an asset and a liability.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

Tuesday saw the opening of the 114th Congress. *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at how representative the body is; both houses

are about 80 percent male and 20 percent female. Whites make up 80 percent and Christians 92 percent, in a Congress that is actually one of the most diverse in its history. *Wonkblog* suggests four smarter things that Congress should have on its agenda rather than voting on the Keystone XL pipeline once again. They [say](#) that the body should pass a national Carbon Tax, raise gas taxes to help fix ageing highways, fix the ethanol mandate in the Renewable Fuel Standard, and extend the Renewable Energy Production Tax Credit.



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

There was drama even before the House met for its first session of the new Congress this week, with challenges appearing to John Boehner, who has held the position as Speaker in the previous two Congresses. *RedState* [says](#) that for the House to re-elect Boehner would be 'insanity' as he is not trusted by most Republicans. On Monday, *National Review's The Campaign Spot* [says](#) that Boehner is about "a dozen" votes away from a serious challenge with at least two others, Louie Gohmert (TX) and Ted Yoho (FL) vying for the role. *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) Tuesday that the challenge to Boehner had failed, with 25 Representatives voting for someone else or 'Present'. They say that the "quixotic Tea Party challenge" against Boehner was of little effect. On Wednesday, *The Atlantic* [examines](#) what Boehner's revenge against those who did not vote for him might be. They say that within hours of the vote, one of Boehner's challengers, Daniel Webster (FL) and two Congressmen who had voted against him, Rich Nugent (FL) and Tim Huelskamp (KA) had been removed from committee posts. They say that those punishments may not stick, and that Boehner has refused to say if any of the others that had voted against him would be punished as well. *The Daily Signal* [reports](#) on Thursday that Speaker Boehner has come back fighting after his challenge earlier in the week, stating that he is the most anti-establishment speaker that Congress has ever had, after being labelled by some as an 'establishment' Republican and a 'squish'.

The controversy over Steve Scalise (R-LA) continued this week with the White House stating that the GOP's support for him continuing in his job as House Majority Whip, despite revelations that he spoke to a white supremacist group in 2002 "says a lot" about the party's priorities and values, [reports](#) *FreakOutNation*. *Daily Kos*, meanwhile [writes](#) on Wednesday that though Scalise has stated that he rejects all forms of bigotry, he still voted against making Martin Luther King Day a state holiday in 2004, and voted against hate crimes legislation in 1997 while a state legislator.

Talking Points Memo writes this week that Speaker Boehner has already signaled that the new Republican Congress will use the bill that funds the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which expires at the end of February to undo President Obama's executive action to halt deportations for millions of undocumented immigrants. They [say](#) that the House and Senate could try to pass bills which would renew DHS funding, but would prohibit funds for processing work permits for undocumented immigrants, which would then likely be vetoed by President Obama. Meanwhile, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that House Democrats have been able to successfully block the GOP's attempt to gut the Volcker Rule and other key parts of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street reform law by denying the bill's passage in suspension, which would require a 2/3 majority vote.

Moving over to the Senate, *PoliticoUSA* [writes](#) on Friday that Senate Democrats have introduced amendments into the bill to authorize the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline that would prohibit oil exports and push green energy. They say that while the GOP are likely to vote down these amendments, they are the first shots in the Democrats' two year stint as Minority Party. *Daily Kos*, [meanwhile](#), looks at the likelihood for infighting within the GOP's Senate caucus as they say that the new Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell (KY) needs to keep Republicans on together and message ahead of the 2016 presidential election. They say that Texas Senator Ted Cruz is going to be a challenge for McConnell as Cruz is pushing for a GOP "bold agenda".

Looking at the judiciary this week, *The Hill's Congress blog* [writes](#) that the Supreme Court's docket this year is likely to have important implications for the 2016 presidential race. They say that of the likely battles over President Obama's attempts to expand executive power will be over Obamacare's subsidies in state health care exchanges, currently before the Court as *King v Burwell*. *Daily Kos* [expands](#) on this on Monday, writing that the Republican Party has turned to the courts in order to thwart Obama's policies in areas such as climate change and immigration as well.



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

Foreign policy, defense and trade

National Journal [looks](#) at how 2014 became the worst year in U.S.-

Russia relations since the end of the Cold War. They say that the Putin regime's annexation of the Crimea in Ukraine and bans on U.S. food imports has removed all hope of another 'reset' in relations. They say while the Obama administration has tried to change Putin's worldview through sanctions, these have only been in effective in hurting Russia's economy.

This week *The American Interest* [looks](#) at what they say are seven shocking possibilities for the Middle East in 2015. These include a Saudi invasion of Bahrain, uprisings in Morocco and Algeria, and violence in Turkey. *National Review's The Campaign Spot* meanwhile [writes](#) that there is little or no indication that the U.S. is at war with the forces of the Islamic State in Syria, despite *Operation Inherent Resolve* now passing its 83rd day.

On Tuesday, *The Hill's Congress Blog* [writes](#) that it is time for the U.S. to reinvigorate its security relationship with Mexico, as Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto took part in talks with President Obama this week.

Obamacare and health policy

Thus week, *Daily Kos* reports that the GOP Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker has exposed one of the lies to the party's challenge to the Affordable Care Act currently before the Supreme Court. They [say](#) that Walker has stated that he plans to do nothing if the Supreme Court strikes down federal subsidies for state exchanges, which is a problem for the case's plaintiffs who have argued that states will set up their own health care exchanges if the federally run versions are shuttered. *Wonkblog* writes that Harvard University professors are mad that they will have to pay more in 2015 for health care because of Obamacare. They [say](#) that this is ironic, as Harvard's experts on health economics have helped presidents and Congress to develop health care reforms.

On Saturday, *RedState* [writes](#) that more than 3 million recipients of Obamacare subsidies may owe refunds to the federal government because the amounts given to them were too large. They say that this is a problem that will happen every year, given that the Obamacare system is designed so that people will alter their coverage as regularly as plans change and improve. Meanwhile, *The Federalist* writes that despite what many state, the Republican Party does not have to replace Obamacare if they wish to repeal it. They [say](#) that Obamacare should be deregulated and states allowed to implement their own ideas, rather than there being more centralized control as is currently the case.

The American Interest [writes](#) this week on ten health care stories to watch in 2015, including access restrictions to those even with insurance, Republican tweaks to the Affordable Care Act, and medical innovations.

The economy and society

On Saturday, *The Daily Signal* [examines](#) how the Laffer Curve changed America's economy. They say that the model, which predicts that as tax rates increase, government loses revenue, has held up well, despite its critiques, as tax receipts increased during the Reagan years, even as taxes fell. In more recent economic news, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) this week that fourteen states raised the minimum wage in 2014, with many set to reach \$15 within the next few years.

Recent months have seen dramatic declines in the price of oil. On Monday, *Wonkblog* [says](#) that it has dropped below \$50 per barrel, and that the bottom is not likely to be reached until later this year, given high levels of production in Iraq and Russia.

Many argue that America's public schools are poor and produce students who cannot compete with those from the rest of the world. *PoliticusUSA* [disagrees](#) with this, writing this week that U.S. public schools are among the highest achieving in the world, and that the solution to help those that are performing poorly is tackling income inequality, not further reforms to promote charter schools and breaking teachers' unions.

The Hill's Congress Blog [writes](#) this week that despite media reports that show that most Americans are in favor of the harsh interrogation techniques used by the CIA after 9/11, when people are asked about the specific methods, such as waterboarding and starvation, a majority oppose them.

And finally...

After New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie, was caught on camera awkwardly hugging the owner of the Dallas Cowboys, who had just won a playoff game, *The Federalist* [has eight rules](#) for politicians who are sports fans.

Roll Call's House on the Hill has a [guide](#) to the 114th Congress' legislators with names that some staffers may find hard to pronounce.

Wonkblog [reports](#) that despite our New Year's resolutions, people actually eat even more after the holidays.

Featured image: House Speaker John Boehner Credit: [Gage Skidmore](#) (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-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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