

The GOP wrestles with immigration reform, Presidential rumors for Ohio's Kasich, and how was the State of the Union for you? – US national blog round up for 25 – 31 January

USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson, looks at the best in political blogging from the Beltway. Our round-up of state blogs will follow on Saturday afternoon.

The State of the Union

Section 3 of Article II of the Constitution of the United States states that the President shall “from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measured as he shall judge necessary and expedient”, and over the 225 years since the Constitution was ratified, this provision has evolved into an annual tradition. On Tuesday night, President Obama gave his fifth official State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress. In the lead up, many blogs previewed the address or commented on its current reach and relevance. On Sunday *FreakOutNation* [writes](#) that the President’s advisers had warned that if Congressional lawmakers were unwilling to work with the White House’s agenda, then Obama may go around them with Executive Orders. Ahead of the address, *The Foundry* writes on what Obama should say on defense on foreign policy. They [say](#) that he should focus on preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear-armed state, engage with old allies, push for a more robust NATO, and reaffirm national security policies such as strengthening America’s nuclear weapons capabilities. Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* has [everything you need to know](#) about the State of the Union, *National Journal* advises [not to watch it](#), and for *Outside the Beltway*, the address is [pointless](#). On Tuesday, *The Monkey Cage* gives three ways that the Republican Party can [improve](#) the way it responds to the State of the Union. Finally, *Crooks & Liars* writes that House Speaker John Boehner has said that the day of the address is the ‘[hardest day of the year](#)’.

After Tuesday night’s address, reaction was mixed. For the *The Atlantic*, Obama’s State of the Union was ‘[unexpectedly energetic](#)’, while *Outside the Beltway* says it was ‘[low-key](#)’ and ‘[low ambition](#)’. *The American Prospect* writes on the [six constituencies that the State of the Union mattered](#), starting with the news media and not-so-loyal Democrats. Returning to earlier concerns about Obama’s use of Executive Power, *Wonkblog* gives the [seven policies](#) that the President said in his address that he’d pursue without Congress. *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that Speaker Boehner has said that Obama is on thin ground in his desire to use his Presidential power to get things done, strongly implying an impeachment threat if he continues in this way.



Credit: Speaker Boehner (Creative Commons: BY-NC 2.0)

The Democratic Party, the GOP and elections

On Monday, *The Lonely Conservative* [looks](#) at Democratic lawmakers who, while pushing for increasing the minimum wage, pay their own interns nothing. Meanwhile, *Daily Kos* gives [two charts that show](#) the Democrats' trend of becoming more liberal isn't hurting them, as more and more Americans are identifying themselves as liberal. Meanwhile *Red State* [examines](#) new polling that says that only 37 percent of Americans are confident that President Obama will make the right decisions about the country's future. On similar lines, *American Thinker* writes that Obama's 'dismal' [standing with millennials](#) (18-34 year olds) is a threat to his second term in office. *The Monkey Cage* [writes](#) that Obama's State of the Union address will do little to turn his low polling numbers around, given that speeches rarely make Presidents more popular. On Wednesday, after the State of the Union, *National Journal* [wonders](#) if Obama is sacrificing control of the Senate in his push to use his Executive Power to get things done. Obama appears to be not the most popular person even among Democrats this week, as *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that some red-state Democrats are refusing to appear with him at public events. On Thursday *The Atlantic* [reports](#) on the retirement of Henry Waxman, saying that the 20-term liberal Democratic representative from California's departure lends credence to the theory that the Democrats have given up on any chance of taking back the House in the mid-term elections later this year.

On Sunday, *The Political Carnival* looks at the Republican Party's continuing obsession with the 'ghost of Ronald Reagan'. Meanwhile, *The Monkey Cage* [writes](#) that the GOP has a 50 percent (or so) chance of taking the Senate come November. On Monday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that Republicans have attacked the likely Democratic Presidential candidate in 2016, Hillary Clinton, for her comments that their party is anti-women. The basis for their attack is that her husband, Bill Clinton, had an affair with a White House intern two decades ago. *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that the Democratic candidate, Michelle Nunn, is currently leads polling in Georgia's open Senate race. They say that this should be a message to the Republican Party, as three Congressmen who are vying for the GOP's nomination are all extremely conservative. On a more positive note, *Caffeinated Politics* [writes](#) on Tuesday that Arizona Senator, John McCain is a model for how Republicans should act to be effective in Washington. They applaud him for his generally consensus-building attitude and political maturity.

One Republican who finds himself in very few people's good books is New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who is currently fending off allegations of corruption over the "Bridgegate" scandal.

PoliticusUSA [says](#) that a recent poll has shown his popularity has taken a nosedive, potentially leaving the GOP without centrist candidate in the 2016 Presidential election. On Wednesday, *National Journal* profiles Ohio's Governor, [John Kasich](#), who they say is the contender for the Republicans in 2016 that everyone seems to be overlooking at the moment.

Another Republican in trouble this week is New York Representative Michael Grimm, who [threatened to throw a local reporter off of a balcony](#) after the State of the Union on Tuesday.



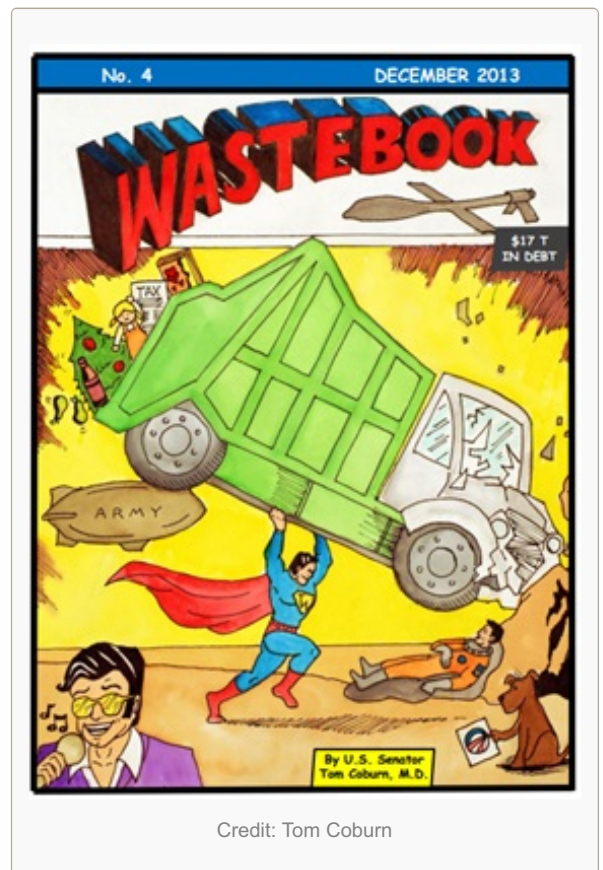
Ohio Governor John Kasich – Photo Credit: Governor Beshear (Creative Commons: BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

Within a few months, the U.S. is once again likely to reach its national debt limit, and a solution will have to be agreed upon by Congress. On Monday, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, and Senator Ted Cruz have once again made 'unreasonable' demands of President Obama in exchange for their support in raising the debt limit. They say that Cruz and McConnell are setting America on a course towards economic catastrophe if they continue their demands. Meanwhile, *The Lonely Conservative* [writes](#)

that Congressional lawmakers are no longer focusing on reducing the deficit.

This week also saw the passage by the House of a \$1 trillion farm bill that would continue agricultural subsidies and food stamps. *American Thinker* [says](#) that the bill is a boondoggle, which maintains anti-market principles via generous subsidies to corporate farmers. *The Atlantic* [says](#) that the bill's passage is proof that Congress is getting better, as the bill had previously been mired in partisan conflicts that led to a two-year delay. While Congress may be getting better, Congressional oversight may need some improvement according to *Roll Call*. They look at Oklahoma Republican Senator Tom Coburn's latest "[Wastebook](#)" which highlights unnecessary government spending. They say that the book, which is modelled on a comic book, is not entirely accurate in its depiction of some spending. *Daily Kos* [looks](#) at another form of Senate oversight, as the Senate Intelligence Committee this week pressed intelligence chiefs over the National Security Agency's potentially illegal surveillance activities. Still on the Senate, *United Liberty* [argues](#) that Senate gridlock is down to the Democratic Majority Leader, Harry Reid, who has limited minority rights in the chamber, thus upping the tension between the two parties.



On Thursday, *The Foundry* [reports](#) that the Republican Congressional caucus has gone on a retreat in Cambridge, Maryland this week, to discuss their strategy on immigration reform. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that Speaker John Boehner's is attempting to convince his caucus that 'weak-tea' reforms are in the party's interest, but that he is very likely to face a very hostile gathering, with many GOP members adamantly opposing any reforms. *Hit & Run* writes that the Republican restrictionists are '[going nuts](#)' over immigration reform. *American Thinker* [argues](#) that the GOP should pass a 'modest' immigration proposal; one that focuses on border security, tougher employment sanctions and a path to legalization for young people, not wholesale amnesty for all undocumented immigrants.

Affordable Care Act

This week sees news that enrollment the new Affordable Care Act program ('Obamacare'), has topped the three million mark, writes *PoliticusUSA*. They [say](#) that the administration is only 300,000 behind their enrollment target, which is a major victory for President Obama. *Wonkblog* tentatively [agrees](#), saying that Obamacare may just hit its sign-up projection, especially as enrollment may spike in March, which a deadline for making a decision about buying coverage. *Daily Kos* says that Republicans are correct that Obamacare is a political disaster – at least [for their own party](#), given that polls show that Democrats are more trusted to a better job dealing with health care. Despite all these positive points about Obamacare, *Hit & Run* points out that [unfavorable views](#) of the program have grown among the uninsured.

Foreign policy and defense

On Saturday, *American Thinker* [reports](#) that the White House has defended its choice of top Democratic donor, George Tsunis, to be the U.S. Ambassador to Norway, after at his confirmation hearing it emerged that he did not know some rather basic details about Norway and its politics. Later in the week, *The Lonely Conservative* [writes](#) that retiring Democratic Senator Max Baucus is no expert on China – which is to be his Ambassadorial post. *The Foundry* [looks](#) at recent comments from the UK's Sir Hew Strachan, advisor to the Chief of the British Defense Staff, that President Obama has no sense of what he wants to do in terms of foreign policy. *The Atlantic* [writes](#) on Thursday that Senator Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, exaggerates the threat of global terrorism by counting attacks on the U.S. military by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The economy and society

Inequality and the barriers to upward mobility are back on the agenda in the U.S. On Sunday, *The Atlantic* looks at [why the American Dream is dead in the South](#). They say the problems are about place and race, segregation a lack of social capital, and changing family structures. On Monday, *The Foundry* [gives](#) the surprising news that over 25 percent of households that receive food stamps are headed by those who have attended college. They put this down to college students picking the wrong subjects and thus being less successful, and high college costs.

On Monday, *Roll Call* [reports](#) that 51 percent of Americans feel that marijuana use should now be made legal, and while Congress is still a long way of legalization at the Federal level there are many smaller measures, such as fairer sentences for drug offenses that can be put in place as attitudes change.

Wonkblog looks at the U.S. current oil boom, [writing](#) that while it means fewer imports, it isn't likely that this will reduce the trade deficit in the long run.

Chris Christie's 'Bridgegate' has been the news a great deal recently, but *The Hill's Congress blog* [says](#) that the real scandal is in the state of the nation's deteriorating bridges, writing that there are more than 65,000 structurally deficient bridges in the U.S.

And finally...

The Lonely Conservative reports that Hillary Clinton has [not driven a car](#) in nearly two decades.

The Monkey Cage gets into the spirit of the State of the Union with a [bingo game](#) for viewers at home to play.

Daily Kos [reports](#) that the State of the Union 'date night' phenomenon, where Republicans and Democrats sit next to one another at the address as a symbol of cooperation, has now died a death.

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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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