

Obama's long game, Paul vs Cruz over Cuba policy and record growth: US national blog round up for 20 – 26 December

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 Saturday this week, *Political Animal* [writes](#) that, despite conservative pundits accusing him of being listless for the past two years compared to his recent executive actions, President Obama has been playing the 'long game', and that his recent moves have been planned since the beginning of his second term. *The Atlantic*, meanwhile, says that 2014 marked the end of the 'Obama era', with the decline in the prominence of the Tea Party and the inability of the Democratic Party to win elections against the GOP's more 'upbeat, sanitized' candidates.

On Sunday, *PoliticusUSA* [says](#) that Obama has 'turned the tables' on Republicans, with his argument that the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay is too expensive to keep open – costing \$2.8 million per inmate per year. Later in the week, *Daily Kos* looks at how Obama could give the middle classes a raise without Congress. They [say](#) that if he raises the overtime eligibility level above its current level of \$455, then this would make many salaried workers much better off.

Looking at the Democratic Party more generally, on Monday, *Crooks & Liars* [writes](#) that 'Blue dogs' are now almost extinct in Congress, with progressive candidates having a better year in the recent midterms than those with more centrist positions. One of the most well-known of these progressives is Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts. *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that while many are calling for her to run for the Presidency in 2016, she is needed in the Senate because she bolsters the growing liberal wing of the Democratic Senate caucus. On Wednesday, *Mischiefs of Faction* [looks](#) at what Obama's recent good fortune in terms of falling gas prices, rising economic growth and success in diplomacy with Cuba will have on the future of his party.

Moving to the Republican Party, on Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* looks at the disagreement this week between Senator Marco Rubio (FL) and Rand Paul (KY) over the Obama administration's announcement of the move towards normalization of relations with Cuba. They [say](#) that Paul has broken with many of his GOP counterparts by supporting the Cuba move, with a Twitter war erupting between him and Rubio:

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On Monday, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the 'establishment' section of the GOP has started to fight back against its Tea Party wing as exemplified by Texas Senator Ted Cruz. They say that Cruz's 'sidekick', Senator Mike Lee of Utah, may be facing a primary challenge in the 2016 election from those who are sick of his hard line positions. *RedState* profiles Bruce Rauner, the Governor-elect of Illinois. They [say](#) that he could very quickly become a Republican 'rock star' if he was to look into how the Chicago Tribune was tipped off to petition for the unsealing of the divorce records of 2004 Senate candidate Jack Ryan. Ryan was forced to withdraw from the Senate race when his records were made public. His replacement? One Barack Obama.

Elections and the road to 2016

National Journal [takes stock](#) of how 2014 was for some of the more prominent 2016 presidential contenders. They say that Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio and Rand Paul all finish the year in relatively strong positions, but Hillary Clinton, Chris Christie and Ted Cruz are worse off.

On Monday, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the GOP looks to be getting nervous that Ben Carson is looking to run for the presidency in 2016. They say that Carson, a former neurosurgeon and writer, may help the GOP's primary season to be even more drawn out and bloody than is currently predicted.

The Hill's Congress blog [comments](#) on former Virginia Senator Jim Webb's ambitions to be the Democratic presidential candidate, writing on Tuesday that while he may look attractive as a populist candidate, his age (he will be 70 in 2016), and his opposition to affirmative action and tax increases puts him on the wrong side of issues that are important to progressives.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

In the wake of the tragic shooting of two New York Police Department officers this week, *The Volokh Conspiracy* has [seven steps](#) that the Attorney General, Eric Holder, should take to prevent more police officers from being murdered. They say that Holder should send representatives from the Obama administration to the officer's funerals, stop tolerating law-breaking by protesters, and recognize a national day of support for the police.

On Sunday, *Political Animal* [looks](#) at what we might expect from the 114th Congress, due to meet in early January. They say that the GOP-controlled Congress won't be able to repeal President Obama's executive actions, nor will they be able to hold the government hostage given that the budget has been agreed for at least the next nine months. This may force the Republicans to actually attempt to govern by negotiation. More specifically, *The American Interest* [writes](#) that 2015 is likely to be the year that the Keystone XL pipeline is approved by Congress, after a review from the Nebraska Supreme Court reports after the holiday recess. If the Nebraska court finds in favor of the pipeline, then the White House's opposition is likely to disappear, giving Senate Republicans the opportunity to push through a bill to approve the project.



Congressional Republicans will pick a new chief for the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) when the term of the current chief, Douglas Elmendorf, runs out next year, [reports Hit & Run](#). They hope that the GOP does not get too invested in changing the way the CBO performs its budget analysis through dynamic scoring, which would make tax cuts easier.

This week also saw the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee release more findings into the alleged targeting of Tea Party organizations by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) before the 2012 election. *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that the report has found that IRS were unable to keep politics out of its decisions about how to apply the tax code.

On Sunday, *Crooks & Liars* [reports](#) that a panel investigating the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) search of a computer network used by the staff of the Senate Intelligence Committee working on the report into the use of 'enhanced interrogation techniques' has recommended that no-one be punished for their actions. They say the finding is not surprising given that it was appointed by John Brennan, who heads the CIA. *The Atlantic* gives a [primer](#) on Tuesday on the history of the CIA's unpunished spying on the Senate.

Staying in the Senate, *PoliticusUSA* writes this week that the soon to be Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has blamed Democrats for the Senate's lack of activity in recent years. They [say](#) that McConnell is trying to shift the blame for

obstruction in the Senate which was the responsibility of the GOP, who have been in the minority up until now.

On Saturday, *Hit & Run* [writes](#) that Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) doesn't understand regulatory capture, after she expressed surprise that the goals of regulation are routinely undermined by the interests that they are supposed to rein in. They say that this lack of appreciation of the ubiquity of this type of cronyism is a problem for someone who is trying to act as a regulator.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

This week saw increasing tensions between North Korea and the U.S. over the Sony Pictures movie, *The Interview*. On Saturday, *The Atlantic* [reports](#) that North Korea has claimed that it was not involved in a cyberattack on Sony Pictures which led to the company cancelling the release of the movie. *Outside the Beltway* [comments](#) this week that the U.S. has relatively limited options in responding to North Korea's cyber-attacks, especially given that the country's relative isolation will make any sanctions ineffective. *The Daily Signal* [disagrees](#), debunking what they say are six myths around the current sanction regime against North Korea. *The Lonely Conservative*, meanwhile, [wonders](#) whether or not President Obama stopped the U.S. intelligence community from responding to North Korea's hacking attack.

Obamacare and health policy



Credit: Global Panorama (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

On Wednesday, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that support for Obamacare's exchanges and subsidies are supported by 78 and 76 percent of Americans, respectively.

The economy and society

On Sunday, *The Daily Signal* [looks](#) at how the George W. Bush-era education policy of No Child Left Behind can be reformed as Congress looks at reauthorizing it. They say that lawmakers should be pursuing bold education reforms such as allowing states to opt out of the policy and reducing the number of programs that fall under its remit.

Daily Kos [reports](#) this week that the U.S. now has a record wealth gap between middle and high income families.

They say that new research shows that middle income families' wealth remained unchanged in 2013, at \$96,500 while that of upper income families increased to more than \$40,000 to just under \$640,000. On Tuesday, *Political Animal* [says](#) that new figures from the Department of Commerce show that GDP growth exceeded 5 percent in the third quarter of 2014 – the highest quarterly rise since 2003.

The American Prospect [looks](#) at job growth under President Obama, saying that he will have seen 12 million new jobs created since he became president, ahead of Richard Nixon and George W. Bush, but behind Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan.

On Monday, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at the differing approaches of New York and Maryland to fracking. While New York banned the practice, Maryland has allowed it to go forward. They say the divergent policies are down to the politics; in Maryland, Democrat Martin O'Malley is being replaced by a pro-fracking GOP Governor in the form of Larry Hogan while, Democratic Governor, Andrew Cuomo, was re-elected in New York. Maryland also has far less land that is on the table for drilling and fracking.

Americablog [writes](#) on Tuesday that the Food and Drug Administration has amended its long standing ban on gay people donating blood, so long as they have not had sex in the previous year. They say that while the policy is a step in the right direction, it is still homophobic as it is based on sexual orientation, rather than scientific research.

And finally...

Wonkblog has a [visualization](#) of the days of the year when Americans are most drunk – January through March have the highest levels.

Featured image credit: The White House

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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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