

# TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

FEBRUARY 8, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

## THE FEBRUARY CRISIS:

DHS Funding Cliff, Economic Populism & The Fight for Federal Control (Feb 8-13, 2026)

### THE DHS STANDOFF & ICE REFORM DEMANDS

**DEMOCRATS & ACTIVISTS**

- Decouple Funding
- BAN MASKED AGENTS
- END 'ROVING PATROLS'
- Body Cam Mandates

DEADLINE:

FEB 13

DHS SHUTDOWN LOOMS

### TRUMP ADMIN & GOP LEADERSHIP

**BORDER AGENT LOUHHIP**

- Risk TSA/FEMA Operations
- PRIORITIZE NATIONAL SECURITY
- Accusations of 'Illegal Immigrant Criminals'
- Agent Drawdown (MN) & Body Cam Deployment

WEEK OF FEB 8

### ECONOMIC & CULTURAL POPULISM IN ACTION

#### TRUMPRX.GOV & 'HEALTH CARE WARS'

**MOST FAVORED NATION PRICING**

- Insulin Capped \$25
- Ozempic/Wegovy -578%
- IVF Discounts

**TARIFF THREATS on Pharma**

- Force Domestic Manufacturing

#### ANTITRUST AS CULTURE WAR (Netflix-Warner)

**MERGER SCRUTINY & 'WOKE CONTENT'**

Market Concentration Concerns  
Cruz/Hawley Critique: 41% LGBTQ+ Themes in Kids' TV

**45-DAY THEATRICAL WINDOW COMMITMENT**

### REDEFINING FEDERAL POWER & AGENCY AUTONOMY

#### NATIONALIZING ELECTIONS?

**WEAPONIZATION OF FEDERALISM**

TRUMP: Federal 'Take Over' of Local Voting  
SAVE Act & MEGA Act (Proof of Citizenship, No Universal Mail-In)  
Dems/Experts: 'Unconstitutional' vs State Authority

#### NIH 'MODERNIZATION' & 'DE-POLITICIZATION'

**TERMINATED (\$561M+)**

5,500+ Grants Cut (Cancer, MRNA)  
BAN on Fetal Tissue Research  
Shift to 'Anti-Woke', Autism & Chronic Disease Focus

### DEEP DIVE: TRENDS, THEMES & OUTLOOK

**1. WEAPONIZED FEDERALISM**  
(Shifting Definitions based on Goals)

**2. ECONOMIC NATIONALISM**  
(Tariffs as Pricing Tool)

**3. EROSION OF AGENCY AUTONOMY**  
(Political Appointees over Career Staff)

#### HYPOTHESES & FUTURE OUTLOOK

DHS Shutdown Highly Probable (Feb 13)?  
Antitrust as New Culture Battleground (Algorithm Bias Laws?)  
Bipartisan Push on Housing (End Hedge Fund Control)?  
Health Care Realignment to 'MAHA' (Price Transparency, Recovery Outcomes)?

#### LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP (Key Bills)

SAVE Act    MEGA Act    DIGNITY Act    DEFIANCE Act    Great American Recovery Act    Laken Riley Act

# TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

FEBRUARY 8, 2026

---

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION  
LEVERAGES ECONOMIC POPULISM  
AND FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT  
EXPANSION AMID INTENSIFYING  
DHS FUNDING CRISIS AND  
ELECTION INTEGRITY DEBATES

## DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

---

On February 8, 2026, the United States federal government faced a critical week as the February 13 deadline for Department of Homeland Security (DHS) funding approached. In the Senate, Majority Leader John Thune and Republican leadership condemned Democrats for refusing to pass a previously negotiated funding package, while Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democrats demanded sweeping reforms to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) tactics following the deaths of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis. These demands include body camera mandates, the banning of masks for federal agents, and the elimination of "roving patrols." Simultaneously, President Trump announced the launch of **TrumpRx.gov**, a major executive initiative designed to implement "Most Favored Nation" drug pricing, significantly slashing the costs of insulin, IVF treatments, and weight-loss medications like

Ozempic by leveraging tariffs against pharmaceutical companies and foreign nations.

The day was also marked by a contentious Senate Antitrust Subcommittee hearing on the proposed merger between Netflix and Warner Bros. Discovery, where lawmakers expressed concern over market concentration, the impact on creative labor, and the potential for "woke" content to dominate the streaming landscape. In the legislative sphere, the **SAVE Act** and the **Make Elections Great Again (MEGA) Act** were central topics of debate following President Trump's call to "nationalize" federal elections to address perceived local corruption. Furthermore, the Senate HELP Committee scrutinized the National Institutes of Health (NIH) regarding the abrupt termination of nearly 5,500 grants, including critical cancer and mRNA research, as the administration sought to de-politicize the agency and refocus on chronic disease outcomes and autism research.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

---

### The DHS Funding Standoff and ICE Reform Demands

- Senate Democrats have decoupled DHS funding from a larger six-bill package to exert leverage for ICE reforms, specifically targeting the use of "secret police" tactics and roving patrols ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- Republican leaders assert that a DHS shutdown would jeopardize TSA, FEMA, and Coast Guard operations, accusing Democrats of prioritizing "illegal immigrant criminals" over national security ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- The Trump administration announced a drawdown of 700 federal agents from Minnesota following increased local law enforcement cooperation, while simultaneously deploying body cameras to all agents in Minneapolis ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

## **TrumpRx.gov and Most-Favored-Nation Drug Pricing**

- President Trump formally launched TrumpRx.gov, claiming it as the largest prescription drug price reduction in history by requiring companies to offer the U.S. the lowest price paid by any other nation ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- The initiative includes dramatic cost reductions: insulin capped at \$25, Ozempic and Wegovy reduced by 578% to \$199, and significant discounts for IVF fertility drugs ([Source](#)).
- The administration is utilizing the threat of substantial tariffs to compel pharmaceutical companies to return manufacturing to the United States ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

## **Senate Scrutiny of the Netflix-Warner Bros. Merger**

- The Senate Antitrust Subcommittee held hearings on the merger of the world's largest streaming platform with a major content studio, raising concerns about vertical foreclosure and market dominance ([Source](#)).
- Lawmakers, specifically Senators Cruz and Hawley, critiqued Netflix's content library, alleging a 41% "woke" or LGBTQ+ thematic concentration in G-rated children's programming ([Source](#)).
- Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos committed under oath to maintaining a traditional 45-day theatrical release window for Warner Bros. films to support the theater industry ([Source](#)).

## **NIH Modernization and Grant Controversies**

- The NIH has terminated or frozen over \$561 million in research, including 118 cancer trials and 97 infectious disease trials, as part of a "de-politicization" effort ([Source](#)).
- Director Jayanta Bhattacharya defended the shift toward a "unified funding strategy" intended to favor young scientists and rural research institutions over elite coastal universities

([Source](#)).

- The administration has banned the use of human fetal tissue from elective abortions in all taxpayer-funded research, mandating a shift to alternative stem cell technologies ([Source](#)).

## **Debate Over Nationalizing Federal Elections**

- President Trump proposed that the federal government should "take over" voting in at least 15 jurisdictions, including Detroit and Philadelphia, to ensure election honesty ([Source](#)).
- Constitutional experts and Democratic lawmakers warn that nationalizing elections violates the Elections Clause of Article I, Section 4, which vests primary authority in state legislatures ([Source](#)).
- Republicans continue to push the **SAVE Act** and the **MEGA Act**, which would ban universal vote-by-mail and require proof of citizenship for registration ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

## **DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES**

---

**The Weaponization of Federalism:** A significant trend is the shifting definition of federalism depending on the policy goal. The Trump administration is using federal authority to "nationalize" election standards and surge federal agents into cities ([Source](#), [Source](#)), while Democrats are using state-level "sanctuary" laws to resist federal immigration enforcement ([Source](#), [Source](#)). This creates a fragmented law enforcement landscape where "secret police" tactics are becoming a primary point of political and physical conflict ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

**Economic Nationalism through Tariffs:** The administration is moving beyond trade wars into "health care wars," using tariffs not just for protectionism but as a tool to dictate

global pharmaceutical pricing ([Source](#)). By tying drug costs to international price benchmarks and threatening penalties for those who do not manufacture domestically, the executive branch is aggressively reshaping the private sector ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

**The Erosion of Agency Autonomy:** Across the NIH and DHS, career civil servants are being replaced by political appointees at an unprecedented rate ([Source](#)). The NIH modernization efforts reflect a broader MAGA-aligned theme of dismantling "DEI" and "woke science" in favor of specific research priorities like autism causes and vaccine-skepticism-friendly research ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

## **HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE LEGISLATIVE OUTLOOK**

---

**DHS Funding Cliff:** Barring a "softer touch" deal on ICE transparency, a DHS shutdown on February 13 is highly probable. Democrats appear willing to risk a shutdown to force a permanent ban on masked federal agents and roving patrols, while Republicans may use the shutdown to highlight "sanctuary city" lawlessness ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

**Antitrust as Culture War:** The Netflix-Warner merger review will likely serve as a blueprint for a new form of antitrust enforcement that considers "ideological bias" and "content diversity" as factors in market power. Legislative efforts may emerge to require streamers to provide "balanced" content algorithms ([Source](#)).

**The Death of Home Ownership:** With the administration and some Democrats (like Sen. Merkley) agreeing on banning hedge funds from buying single-family homes, we may see a rare bipartisan push for the **End Hedge**

**Fund Control of American Homes Act** or similar legislation later this session ([Source](#)).

**Health Care Realignment:** The Great American Recovery Act and the success of TrumpRx.gov could shift the public health debate away from universal coverage toward price transparency and outcome-based addiction recovery models, potentially creating a new "MAHA" (Make America Healthy Again) legislative bloc ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

## **LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP**

---

The current legislative environment is dominated by the DHS funding deadline and competing election reform packages. Lawmakers are also advancing bipartisan bills targeting digital safety and housing supply.

### **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **SAVE America Act:** Requires proof of citizenship for federal election registration and mandates photo I.D. for voting ([Source](#)).
- **Make Elections Great Again (MEGA) Act:** Proposed legislation to ban universal vote-by-mail and rank-choice voting while increasing federal oversight of voter rolls ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **DIGNITY Act:** A bipartisan immigration bill with over 30 sponsors aiming to create a legal pathway for long-term undocumented residents without criminal records ([Source](#)).
- **DEFIANCE Act:** Bipartisan legislation to allow victims of non-consensual AI-generated pornography to take civil action ([Source](#)).
- **Great American Recovery Act:** Administrative and legislative initiative focusing on outcome-based addiction treatment and "sober housing" ([Source](#)).
- **Laken Riley Act:** A law cited by Republicans as responsible for the detention of an additional 20,000 "illegal immigrant criminals" ([Source](#)).

### **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

• **Senate Antitrust Subcommittee Hearing on Netflix-Warner Bros. Merger:** Scrutinized the market impact of consolidating the world's largest streamer with a premier film studio ([Source](#)). • **Senate HELP Committee Hearing on NIH Modernization:** Examined grant cancellations, agency restructuring, and the ban on fetal tissue research ([Source](#)). • **President Trump's National Prayer Breakfast Speech:** A wide-ranging address touching on military recruitment, religious liberty, and foreign policy triumphs ([Source](#)). • **TrumpRx.gov Launch:** Official announcement of Most Favored Nation drug pricing and manufacturer incentives ([Source](#)). • **Sen. Jeff Merkley Town Hall (Hood River, OR):** Discussion on surveillance technology at airports, AI risks, and the "Big River" affordable housing project ([Source](#)). • **Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Town Hall (Queens, NY):** Focused on "secret police" tactics, the DEFENSE Act, and community protection against ICE ([Source](#)).

## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

---

**Today's Trends On Capitol Hill** is a public interest experiment in applying deep trend analysis to the daily business of the United States Congress to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists, scholars and Congressional staff better understand the overarching legislative trends, themes and patterns of Congress.

**No data is used to train or tune any AI model.**

Each morning, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's Congressional activity to tease out its overarching themes and trends into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original source material, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the legislative themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

This inaugural report is based on deep analysis of CSPAN, CSPAN2 and CSPAN3 coverage in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive. It is currently limited to the Congressional business covered on those three CSPAN channels and thus may not include all major Congressional business, may include activity from previous days that aired on a later date, and/or may include other major federal, state and local governmental business. We will continue to refine this report to incorporate a growing array of Congressional information sources. This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

For questions or suggestions, please contact [kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com](mailto:kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com). You can also learn more about the GDELT Project at <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.