

TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

FEBRUARY 15, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

THE DEADLOCK & THE DEREGULATION: AMERICA'S DIVIDED FRONTIERS

A VISUAL REPORT: DHS SHUTDOWN, ICE REFORM STANDOFF, EPA HISTORIC ROLLBACK, & GLOBAL REALIGNMENT

THE DOMESTIC CONFLICT: DHS SHUTDOWN & IMMIGRATION IMPASSE



MIDNIGHT DEADLINE LAPSE → PARTIAL SHUTDOWN



TWO U.S. CITIZENS
KILLED (MN)

DEMANDS FOR ICE REFORM
END OF METRO SURGE (MN)
AFTER 4000 ARRESTS



\$203 MILLION
ECONOMIC DAMAGE
(MN)

260,000 EMPLOYEES UNPAID:
COAST GUARD, TSA, SECRET SERVICE, FEMA



WAR OF ATTRITION: STATE VS.
FEDERAL SOVEREIGNTY CONFLICT

THE GLOBAL PIVOT: WESTERN INTERESTS & ALLIANCE SHIFTS



MARCO RUBIO SHAKING ON THE
MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE



ARCTIC SENTRY:
SECURITY IN
GREENLAND/
HIGH NORTH

FROM RULES-BASED TO
INTERESTS-BASED DIPLOMACY:
ALLIES QUESTION DURABILITY



EUROPEAN
STRATEGIC
AUTONOMY:
REDUCING
DEPENDENCE ON
U.S. UMBRELLA

UK & EC LEADERS
CALL FOR
EUROPEAN NATO

THE REGULATORY ROLLBACK: HISTORIC EPA DEREGULATION



\$1.3 TRILLION
SAVINGS & \$3000
CAR PRICE REDUCTION



STOP-START
MANDATES &
EV PRESSURES
ELIMINATED



LEGAL BASIS TERMINATED: CITING
LOPER BRIGHT & WEST VIRGINIA V. EPA

DOMESTIC OVERSIGHT & SPECTACLE



EPSTEIN FILES
CONTROVERSY:
AG BONDI FACES
HOSTILE COMMITTEE



THE SPECTACLE OF POLICY:
EXECUTION BY EXECUTIVE ORDER SPEED

HYPOTHESES & FUTURE LEGISLATIVE OUTLOOK: WHAT'S NEXT?



JUDICIAL OVERHAUL:
LOOMING ATTACK ON REGULATORY
STATE (WOTUS NEXT?)



STANDARDIZATION OF LAW
ENFORCEMENT: BODY CAMERAS
& ID FOR FEDERAL AGENTS



NATIONALIZATION OF ENERGY:
BYPASSING LOCAL PERMITTING
FOR NATIONAL SECURITY SITES

LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE: SAVE AMERICA INITIATIVES (VOTER ID, CHILD SAFETY, ENERGY) DOMINATE.
DHS FUNDING STALLED OVER ICE REFORM.

TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

FEBRUARY 15, 2026

DHS SHUTDOWN DEADLOCK OVER
ICE TACTIC REFORM PARALYZES
AGENCIES WHILE TRUMP
ADMINISTRATION EXECUTES
HISTORIC \$1.3 TRILLION EPA
DEREGULATION

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The federal government has entered a partial shutdown of the **Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** following a midnight Friday deadline lapse. The standoff centers on Senate Democratic demands for codified **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)** reforms—including ending masked operations and requiring judicial warrants for home entries—following the shooting deaths of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis. While ICE and **Customs and Border Protection (CBP)** remain operational due to funding from the previously passed "One Big Beautiful Bill," the shutdown has halted pay for 260,000 employees in the **Coast Guard, TSA, Secret Service**, and **FEMA** ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Simultaneously, President Trump and EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin announced the repeal of the 2009 **Endangerment Finding**, the single largest de-regulatory action in U.S. history. The move effectively terminates the legal basis for federal greenhouse gas regulation of

vehicles, with the administration claiming it will save \$1.3 trillion in regulatory costs and reduce new car prices by \$3,000 ([Source](#)). Internationally, at the **Munich Security Conference**, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and NATO leaders navigated a fractured alliance, with the U.S. pivoting toward a Western-civilization-centered interest model while European allies increasingly signaled a shift toward strategic defense autonomy ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

DHS Shutdown and the Minnesota Enforcement Crisis

- **DHS Funding Expiration:** Funding for DHS expired after Lawmakers failed to reach a deal on ICE conduct reforms. Senate Democrats, led by **Chuck Schumer**, refused to grant a "blank check for chaos" following the deaths of **Renée Good** and **Alex Pretti** ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Metro Surge Drawdown:** Border Czar **Tom Homan** announced the end of the "Metro Surge" in Minneapolis after 4,000 arrests, citing improved local cooperation as a condition for the stand-down. Gov. **Tim Walz** countered by detailing \$203 million in economic damage to the city caused by the federal deployment ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Use of Force Debate:** Senate hearings examined the use of **administrative warrants (I-205)** for home entries and the reduction of ICE agent training from 75 to 42 days. Officials confirmed that 70% of current ICE arrestees have criminal records, though Democrats noted only 14% involve violent crimes ([Source](#)).

Historic EPA Deregulation

- **Endangerment Finding Repeal:** The Trump administration officially terminated the 2009 EPA finding that designated greenhouse gases as a threat to public health. Administrator **Lee Zeldin** cited recent Supreme Court precedents (*Loper Bright*, *West Virginia v. EPA*) to argue that greenhouse gas regulation requires explicit Congressional authorization ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Auto Industry Impact:** The move eliminates stop-start engine mandates and electric vehicle fleet pressures. President Trump claimed the action would prompt foreign automakers to invest \$100 billion in U.S.-based manufacturing ([Source](#)).

Munich Security Conference and Global Realignment

- **The Rubio Pivot:** Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** delivered a message of cultural and spiritual reassurance to European allies, emphasizing shared Western heritage while demanding "reciprocity" in defense spending ([Source](#)).
- **Arctic Security:** NATO launched **Arctic Sentry**, a new permanent framework for security in Greenland and the High North. Greenland's Prime Minister **Jens-Frederik Nielsen** reaffirmed sovereignty while acknowledging the necessity of deterring Russian and Chinese naval presence ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **European Strategic Autonomy:** British PM **Keir Starmer** and EC President **Ursula von der Leyen** called for a "European NATO" and deeper economic integration to decrease over-dependence on the U.S. security umbrella ([Source](#)).

Justice Department and Domestic Oversight

- **Epstein Files Controversy:** AG **Pam Bondi** faced a hostile House Judiciary Committee over the release of the Epstein files. Democrats accused the DOJ of protecting powerful "co-conspirators" like **Lex Wexner** and **Prince Andrew** while failing to redact the names of over 1,000 victims ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **National Fraud Division:** The DOJ established a new **National Fraud Division** to target "industrial-scale fraud" in state-administered federal programs, specifically citing \$9 billion in COVID-related fraud in Minnesota ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

State-Federal Sovereignty Conflict: A profound "nullification" crisis is emerging as states like Minnesota and cities like New York and Chicago actively obstruct federal immigration enforcement. The administration is responding with "retribution" tactics, including the withholding of federal grants and the deployment of massive federal surges to force compliance. This dynamic has turned routine law enforcement into a "war of attrition" between levels of government ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

From "Rules-Based" to "Interests-Based" Diplomacy: The U.S. foreign policy rhetoric has shifted from a defense of global democratic values to a defense of "Western Civilization" and "American Interests." This has left allies in Europe and Canada (via **Mark Carney**) questioning the durability of U.S. security guarantees and accelerating a move toward independent European military and nuclear deterrence ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

The "Spectacle" of Policy: Both parties are increasingly using high-visibility events (Epstein file releases, ICE raids, nuclear micro-reactor flights) as messaging tools for their respective bases. Policy is being executed through "Executive Order speed," often bypassing traditional legislative deliberation and resulting in immediate, large-scale legal and social backlash ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE LEGISLATIVE OUTLOOK

Judicial Overhaul of Regulatory Authority: The administration's aggressive use of **Loper Bright** to dismantle the EPA's Endangerment Finding suggests a looming broad-spectrum attack on the regulatory state. Expect the administration to next target the "Waters of the United States" (WOTUS) rule, likely triggering a legislative push for a modernized Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act from Democrats ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Standardization of Federal Law Enforcement: Following the backlash to masked agents, look for a bipartisan legislative effort to require body cameras and standardized identification for all non-undercover federal agents. The **SAVE Act** (Voter ID) may become a vehicle for a broader deal on DHS funding and immigration reform if the shutdown persists ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

The "Nationalization" of Energy: With the successful flight of a nuclear micro-reactor to Utah, the **Department of War** and **Department of Energy** are likely to push for legislation allowing the federal government to bypass local permitting for "National Security Energy Sites," aimed at powering AI data centers and military installations ([Source](#)).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The legislative landscape is currently dominated by the DHS funding impasse and a suite of "Save America" initiatives from the administration targeting voting, child safety, and energy independence.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **SAVE America Act:** Requires photo ID for federal elections and proof of citizenship for voter registration. Passed the House; pending in Senate ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **DHS Funding Bill (Agreement):** A bipartisan agreement to fund DHS components (Coast Guard, Secret Service, TSA) stalled in the Senate over ICE reform demands ([Source](#)).
- **Advanced Nuclear Reactor Prize Act:** Provides grants to offset licensing fees for innovative nuclear technologies. Signed into law last year ([Source](#)).
- **Chloe Cole Act:** Proposed legislation to create a private right of action for children harmed by gender-affirming surgeries or chemical treatments ([Source](#)).
- **Hearing Protection Act:** Part of the "One Big Beautiful Bill," it reduced the firearm tax to zero but maintained registration requirements, currently under DOJ review ([Source](#)).
- **Laken Riley Act:** Requires the detention of any illegal alien who commits a theft-related crime ([Source](#)).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Oversight of the Department of Justice:** AG Pam Bondi testified on the Epstein files, the "Metro Surge" killings, and the Russia Collusion investigation ([Source](#)).

- **DHS Shutdown Impact Hearing:** Federal leaders from the Coast Guard, TSA, CISA, and Secret Service detailed the operational risks of working without pay ([Source](#)).
- **Minnesota ICE Enforcement Hearing:** Senate Homeland Security Committee heard testimony from MN Attorney General Keith Ellison and local officials on federal-state conflict ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **EPA Endangerment Finding Rollback:** Press conference where President Trump and Lee Zeldin announced the historic \$1.3 trillion deregulation ([Source](#)).
- **Munich Security Conference Sidelines:** Key meetings between U.S. officials (Rubio, Zeldin, Murkowski) and European leaders on the High North and the future of NATO ([Source](#), [Source](#), [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. You can also learn more about the GDEL Project at <https://blog.gdelproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.