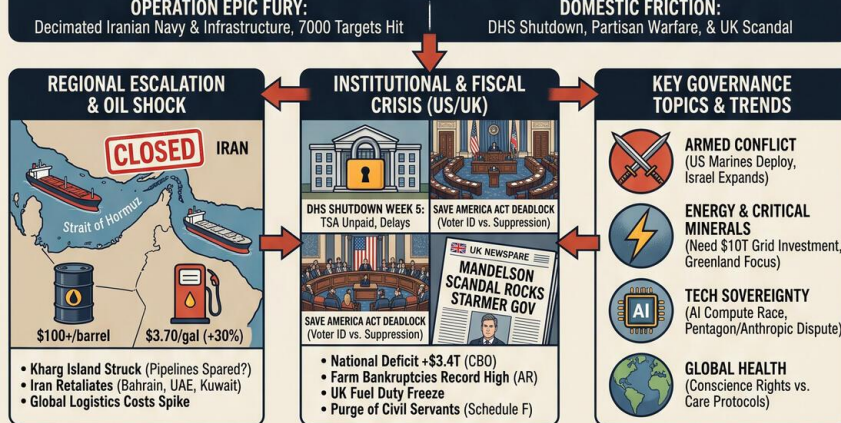


TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

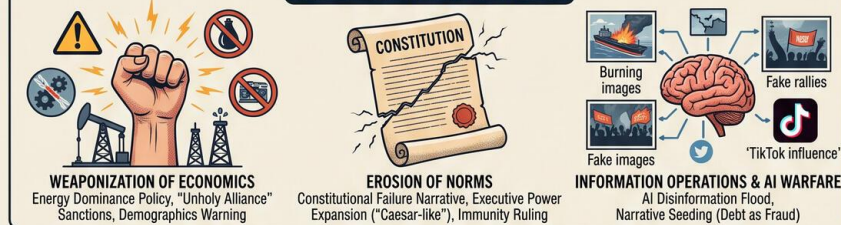
MARCH 16, 2026

T H E G D E L T P R O J E C T

GLOBAL ENERGY SECURITY THREATENED & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY DEEPENS: OPERATION EPIC FURY & THE WESTERN CRISIS (MARCH 2026)



DEEP DIVE: TRENDS & THEMES



GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING & FUTURE OUTLOOK



RISK ASSESSMENT: High Potential for Institutional Failure & Uncontrolled Conflict Expansion.

KEY UNKNOWNNS: True Iranian Leadership Status, Domestic Sleeper Cell Threats, Environmental Impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Accelerate Autonomous Systems, Build Domestic Market Resilience, Pivot Diplomatic Strategy.

TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

MARCH 16, 2026

GLOBAL ENERGY SECURITY
THREATENED AS OPERATION EPIC
FURY DECIMATES IRANIAN
INFRASTRUCTURE AMID
DEEPENING DOMESTIC
INSTABILITY IN THE WEST

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

March 16, 2026, is marked by a dangerous convergence of expanding regional warfare in the Middle East and severe institutional friction within the United States and United Kingdom. The ongoing war against Iran, termed [Operation Epic Fury](#), enters its third week with U.S. and Israeli forces claiming to have [decimated the Iranian navy, air defense, and missile production](#). However, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has sent global oil prices above \$100 a barrel and gasoline prices in the U.S. up 30%, triggering warnings from major logistical actors like [UPS regarding inflationary costs](#) and supply chain bottlenecks.

Domestically, the U.S. government faces a deepening crisis as the [Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\) remains partially shut down](#) for a fifth week. Partisan warfare has intensified over the [SAVE America Act](#), with Republicans demanding proof of citizenship for voting and Democrats labeling

the bill a "voter suppression" effort. This legislative deadlock over ICE and TSA funding occurs while the administration reports an [unprecedented flow of illegal immigration](#) and heightened internal security threats, which political opponents argue are being exploited to justify an [authoritarian expansion of executive power](#).

The administration is attempting to leverage claims of military success to consolidate power, simultaneously purging federal agencies of perceived [disloyal personnel](#) and initiating a [whole-of-government anti-fraud task force](#) that critics suggest targets political rivals. Abroad, traditional alliances are fracturing; the [UK government is in turmoil](#) over a high-profile diplomatic scandal and its hesitation to join U.S. naval operations, while [President Trump](#) publicly criticizes NATO allies for their perceived lack of contribution to the war effort.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Operation Epic Fury and Regional Escalation

- U.S. Central Command reports destroying over [100 Iranian naval vessels](#) and striking 7,000 targets, including missile command infrastructure and drone production plants.
- The strategic [oil hub on Kharg Island](#) has been hit, although the administration claims to have spared the primary pipelines for potential future rebuilding.
- Iran has retaliated by striking U.S. assets and allies in [Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE](#), expanding the conflict's geographic scope.

- A U.S. strike reportedly hit an [Iranian primary school](#), leading to the deaths of 110 children, an event the administration dismisses as a mistake based on "old intelligence."

Institutional and Fiscal Crisis in the United States

- The DHS shutdown enters its second month, leaving [TSA agents working without pay](#) and causing severe delays at major travel hubs during Spring Break.
- Bipartisan conflict over the [SAVE America Act](#) has stalled all other legislative priorities, with the Senate majority leader threatening to block all bills until it passes.
- The CBO reports that a major [reconciliation bill](#) has increased the national deficit by \$3.4 trillion while cutting social programs like SNAP and Medicaid by 20%.
- Arkansas reports the highest rate of [Chapter 12 farm bankruptcies](#) in the nation due to high interest rates, input costs, and trade headwinds.

UK Political Turmoil and the Mandelson Scandal

- The Starmer government faces a "humble address" in Parliament to release documents regarding the [appointment of Peter Mandelson](#) as U.S. Ambassador despite his links to Jeffrey Epstein.
- Evidence suggests Mandelson [lied to the Prime Minister](#) during the due diligence process; he was subsequently dismissed but received a controversial severance package.
- The UK government maintains a [fuel duty freeze](#) to mitigate the impact of the Iran war on the domestic cost of living.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- The U.S. is deploying a [marine unit of 2,500 personnel](#) to the Middle East, signaling a potential shift toward ground raids to secure nuclear materials and combat fast-boat mine layers.
- Israel is expanding its [forward defense area](#) in southern Lebanon to dismantle Hezbollah's rocket capabilities.

Energy & Critical Minerals

- The Strait of Hormuz remains closed, impacting [90-95% of the oil supply](#) for Asian nations like Japan and South Korea.
- The [BlackRock Infrastructure Summit](#) highlights a need for \$10 trillion in investment by 2033 to modernize the U.S. energy grid and support AI scaling.
- Renewed focus on [Greenland's rare earth minerals](#) as the administration adopts a "hemispheric approach" to resource security.

Tech Sovereignty & AI

- OpenAI CEO Sam Altman predicts that by 2028, [more cognitive capacity will exist inside data centers than outside them](#).
- A high-profile dispute emerges between [Anthropic and the Pentagon](#) regarding the ethical use of AI tools for generating target lists in combat.
- The U.S. Army is shifting to a ["software-defined" military](#), emphasizing the rapid deployment of autonomous drone systems and commercial technology integration.

Global Health & Biosecurity

- The [Religious Liberty Commission](#) holds hearings on healthcare, with doctors arguing for conscience rights against being compelled to perform transgender procedures or abortions.
- Whistleblowers at major [children's hospitals](#) allege that gender-affirming care protocols were continued in secret after public denials.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Weaponization of Economic Statecraft Domestic policies in the U.S. are increasingly tied to national security through the "Trump policy of lots of oil," which seeks to achieve [energy dominance](#) by expanding drilling in Alaska, Venezuela, and Guyana while cutting clean energy incentives. This shift is mirrored by the [Enhanced Iran Sanctions Act](#), targeting the "unholy alliance" of China, Russia, and Iran. The CBO warns, however, that these policies may lead to a [smaller working-age population](#) and reduced birth rates due to aggressive anti-immigrant stances, potentially harming long-term GDP growth.

Erosion of Norms and Constitutional Friction There is a growing narrative of "constitutional failure," with legal scholars and political leaders debating the [adequacy of the 1787 framework](#) in the face of modern crises. The administration's move to [purge civil servants](#) and replace them with "loyalists" via Schedule F revisions is described by critics as a threat to the rule of law. Simultaneously, the Supreme Court's [presidential immunity ruling](#) is framed as the creation of a "Caesar-like" executive branch

that operates beyond the reach of the judiciary or the legislative branch.

The New Cold War and Information Operations The conflict with Iran is increasingly viewed as a proxy battle in a [multipolar world](#), with China portrayed as the "quarterback" for Russia and Iran. The [Information Warfare Environment](#) is saturated with AI-generated disinformation, such as faked rallies in Tehran and falsified images of U.S. aircraft carriers on fire. Intelligence officials warn that the **real** threat is the Chinese state's [control of information spaces](#) and its influence over Western youth through platforms like TikTok.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

United States: The nation is experiencing profound partisan polarization, with Democrats accusing the administration of creating a "[secret police](#)" in ICE and Republicans framing Democratic opposition as [treasonous support](#) for open borders. Labor instability is high, particularly in [agriculture and construction](#), where shortages of skilled tradesmen and legal status uncertainty for migrant workers are halting projects. The [DHS shutdown](#) is a direct manifestation of this loss of government mandate to find fiscal compromise.

United Kingdom: Prime Minister Starmer's mandate is weakening under the weight of the [Mandelson-Epstein scandal](#). The public is reportedly "worried sick" about [energy bills rising](#) by 300 pounds in June, a situation the opposition blames on the government's perceived military and diplomatic flip-flopping.

Ukraine: Despite military resilience, the nation faces an "ethical collapse" and severe [mental health crisis](#) among its civilian population. The systematic [abduction of children by Russia](#) is cited as "national homicide," creating a generational gap in human capital that threatens the viability of the post-war state.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is being framed as an [anarchic multipolar arena](#) where traditional alliances are no longer reliable. The Trump administration is signaling a retreat from being the "world's policeman" unless [fully reimbursed](#) by allies. This posture is forcing nations like Israel to "do the dirty work" for the world while the U.S. provides the [firepower and intelligence](#). The administration's focus is on [bilateral deals](#) rather than multilateral treaties, threatening to isolate the U.S. from European partners who are now [booting the U.S. from intelligence sharing](#) due to policy disagreements.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Geopolitical risks are now being fully priced into financial markets, with oil and energy commodities leading the inflationary surge.

- **Oil Prices:** Above \$100 per barrel due to the [Hormuz closure](#).
- **Gasoline:** Average price of [\\$3.70 per gallon](#), up 30%.
- **Agriculture:** Record high debt loads for farmers; corn production costs [far exceed current market prices](#).

- **Capital Flows:** Nearly \$6 billion in funding for [small innovative tech firms](#) was frozen due to a lapse in the SBIR program reauthorization.
- **Logistics Costs:** UPS reports that every five minutes of driver delay costs the company [\\$114 million](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The day's events highlight a significant reshuffling of power within the U.S. and UK security and diplomatic apparatuses.

- **Markwayne Mullin:** Appointed to lead [DHS](#) after the reassignment of Kristi Noem to a "Special Envoy" role. His confirmation is expected to be a referendum on Trump's immigration crackdown.
- **Peter Mandelson:** Former UK U.S. Ambassador, [dismissed](#) following revelations of Epstein-related lies; his exit leaves a vacuum in UK-US relations.
- **Kash Patel:** Portrayed by critics as a "wrecking ball" [purging the FBI](#) of career officers to ensure political loyalty.
- **Matt Flocka:** Appointed as Executive Director of the [Trump-Kennedy Center](#), overseeing a \$300 million renovation and a two-year closure of the facility.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network's **lead stories** focused on the perceived military triumphs in Iran and the domestic "war" on voter fraud, creating an **emotional tone of nationalistic urgency**. The network heavily publicized the [anti-fraud task force](#) as a solution to national debt, framing illegal immigrants as the primary cause of fiscal instability. **Buried stories**

included the strike on the [Iranian school](#) and the potentially catastrophic [long-term deficit projections](#) from the CBO. **Conspicuous omissions** include any detailed analysis of the civilian casualties in Iran beyond the single school incident, or a coherent explanation of how the U.S. plans to reopen Hormuz if allies continue to refuse naval cooperation.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

Portrayals of state and non-state actors are divided along stark friend/foe lines, with the current administration moving toward a "hemispheric" isolationism that views even traditional allies with skepticism.

COUNTRIES

- **Iran:** Characterized as "the face of evil" and a "global leader of terror" ([Cooper](#)). Portrayed as weak and decimated militarily, yet capable of "indiscriminate fire" against civilians in Israel and the UAE ([Danan](#)).
- **United Kingdom:** Framed as the "Rolls-Royce of allies" that nevertheless [failed to show up](#) when needed in the Strait of Hormuz, leading to significant presidential "disappointment" ([Trump](#)).
- **China:** Portrayed as a parasitic beneficiary of U.S. protection of oil routes and a "quarterback" for global anti-American interests ([Kennedy](#)).
- **Israel:** Characterized as a "principled" fighter "doing the dirty work for the entire world" while facing an existential threat ([Danan](#)).

LEADERS

- **Donald Trump:** Portrayed by supporters as a "smart president" taking decisive action to restore "law and order" ([Vance](#)); portrayed by critics as an "autocratic thug" and "bully" trying to "rig democracy" ([Schumer](#)).
- **Keir Starmer:** Characterized as "spooked" and "backpedaling" over the Iran conflict, and "misled" by Peter Mandelson ([UK Opposition](#)).
- **Sam Altman:** Framed as a visionary leading the "abundance of intelligence" era while managing immense capital requirements ([Adebayo](#)).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The **meta-narrative** of the day is heavily shaped by **AI-generated content** used both as a weapon by Iran and as a tool for political distraction by the U.S. administration. Trump warns that [Iranian disinformation](#) uses AI to show fake attacks on U.S. ships, while domestic critics point to "fake" audio of Trump ranting about the **Epstein files** ([Fact Check](#)). The administration is also **narrative seeding** the idea that the national debt is a result of "fraud by illegal immigrants" ([Stephen Miller](#)), a claim intended to bypass CBO reports linking the deficit to the recent tax-cut reconciliation bill.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Hormuz Stalemate:** If the U.S. cannot secure a coalition to escort tankers, the administration may be forced into a high-risk [amphibious assault on Kharg Island](#), which could trigger a full regional oil war with Iran's "mine-layer" proxies.
- **Domestic Civil Unrest:** The ongoing [DHS shutdown](#) and missed paychecks for TSA and Coast Guard personnel are likely to lead to mass resignations by the end of March, potentially grounding all U.S. commercial aviation.
- **Regulatory Retribution:** The new [anti-fraud task force](#) will likely focus its first major investigations on "blue states" like Minnesota and California, potentially halting federal Medicaid transfers as a form of political warfare.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): The [DHS shutdown](#) will cause widespread airport closures as TSA personnel hit a breaking point. Expect an [escalation in strikes](#) against Iranian fast-boat facilities if mine threats persist in the Strait of Hormuz.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): Legislative focus will shift entirely to the [SAVE America Act](#) and its impact on the 2026 midterms. High energy costs will lead to [fuel rationing talk](#) in the UK and potentially the U.S. if the HORMUZ coalition fails to form.

Long Term (1-5 Years): Structural changes to the U.S. economy will occur as [AI becomes the primary driver of GDP](#), requiring a total overhaul of energy infrastructure (\$10T) that current fiscal deficits make nearly impossible

without significant private capital entry ([BlackRock](#)).

RISK ASSESSMENT

The primary risks center on the potential for institutional failure and the uncontrolled expansion of current military operations.

- **Regional Conflict Overspill:** War in Iran escalates into a multi-front conflict involving ground marines and Hezbollah; Trigger: Iranian strikes on UAE/Bahrain pipelines; Likelihood: High; Impact: Global recession; Mitigation: Immediate diplomatic re-engagement via the EU/UK.
- **U.S. Institutional Collapse:** Prolonged DHS shutdown results in loss of border control and aviation safety; Trigger: Failure to pass a stop-gap funding bill by April 1; Likelihood: Moderate-High; Impact: Severe domestic instability; Mitigation: Decoupling TSA funding from the ICE/Warrant debate.
- **Global Energy Crisis:** Permanent closure or mining of the Strait of Hormuz; Trigger: Loss of a major tanker to a kamikaze boat; Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: Hyper-inflation; Mitigation: Successful formation of the "Hormuz Coalition."
- **Technological Sabotage:** Iranian/Chinese cyber-attack on U.S. medical or financial grids; Trigger: Continued U.S. kinetic strikes on Tehran; Likelihood: High; Impact: Systemic disruption of civilian life; Mitigation: Immediate implementation of "Citizen Spy" ([Vinci](#)) defensive protocols.
- **Famine in Rural America:** Collapse of the U.S. agricultural sector; Trigger: Continued high interest rates combined with tariff-driven input costs; Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: Loss of food sovereignty; Mitigation: Passage of a [bipartisan Farm Bill](#) that prioritizes trade over aid.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts claim [decimation](#) of Iranian leadership, yet acknowledge a "Mosaic defense" that allows decentralized command to survive; the actual status of the new Supreme Leader remains unverified.
- There is no mention of the potential for **domestic strikes** in the U.S. or UK by Iranian sleeper cells, despite repeated warnings about "terrorist watch list" entries.
- The environmental impact of hitting [Kharg Island's oil facilities](#) is entirely missing from the broadcast.
- The legal basis for [U.S. ground forces](#) entering Iran under current AUMFs is not addressed.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Paper Tiger" Fallacy: The administration's portrayal of a "decimated" Iran may be a **deliberate narrative seeding** to cover for the fact that the U.S. is losing the asymmetrical war of attrition. If Iran retains enough "kamikaze boats" to keep Hormuz closed indefinitely, the "victory" is strategic failure.

The "Purge" as Survival Tactic: The shift to [loyalist staffing](#) in the FBI and CIA might not be about efficiency, but a desperate move to protect the executive branch from imminent **insider leaks** regarding the Epstein files or war conduct.

Black Swan Event: A **Chinese-brokered peace** in the Middle East that excludes the U.S., effectively ending the petrodollar's

dominance as oil begins trading in YUAN ([Narrative hint](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Accelerate the transition to [software-defined autonomous systems](#) to offset the deficit in combat-ready personnel.
- **Economic:** Implement the [Buy American Cotton Act](#) and similar trade-incentive bills to build domestic market resilience against foreign tariffs.
- **Diplomatic:** Pivot from hard-sell NATO demands to [regional security partnerships](#) focused on technical cooperation (e.g., cyber and drone defense).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Logistics:** Invest in [dynamic routing and digital twin](#) technologies to mitigate the massive congestion costs of failing highway/port infrastructure.
- **Energy:** Capitalize on the \$10T [infrastructure gap](#) by focusing on small-scale regional power generation and nuclear micro-reactors.
- **Compliance:** Establish robust [China contingency plans](#) (CCP) to manage systemic risks associated with information theft and supply chain reliance.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity is currently paralyzed by partisan standoff over election laws and agency funding, with several key acts serving as flashpoints for broader institutional conflict.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **SAVE America Act:** Requires photo ID and proof of citizenship for federal voting; intended to secure election integrity vs. suppress turnout ([Schumer/Trump](#)).
- **Enhanced Iran Sanctions Act (HR 1422):** Targets logistical enablers of Iranian oil/gas trade; intent is to cripple the IRGC's funding stream ([Lawler](#)).
- **Buy American Cotton Act (BACA):** Provides tax credits for products containing U.S. cotton; intent is to rebuild the domestic textile industry ([Read/Hyde-Smith](#)).
- **Small AI Innovators Empowerment Act:** Addresses access to funding and regulatory hurdles for tech startups; intent is to maintain U.S. AI supremacy ([Carmack](#)).
- **Save Our Sequoias Act (HR 2709):** Expedites environmental reviews for forest management; intent is to protect iconic trees from catastrophic wildfire ([Westerman](#)).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **DHS Confirmation Hearing:** Sen. Markwayne Mullin testifies on his nomination to lead the department amid the shutdown ([Preview](#)).
- **Trump Anti-Fraud Task Force Launch:** Executive order creating a VP-chaired body to root out fraud in federal programs ([Trump/Vance](#)).
- **Building Domestic Demand (Senate Ag):** Hearing on farm bankruptcies, trade policy, and specialty crops ([Boozman](#)).

KEY STORIES

- **Operation Epic Fury Briefing:** Admiral Brad Cooper and President Trump claim 90% reduction in Iranian missile capabilities and the total destruction of the Iranian navy in two weeks ([CENTCOM Update](#)).
- **Kharg Island Strike:** U.S. forces strike a major oil export hub but leave pipelines intact for potential "rebuilding" ([Trump Remarks](#)).
- **DHS Shutdown Crisis:** 5th week of government shutdown over DHS funding; TSA agents unpaid; Schumer blames Trump's "illegal war" for blocking fiscal relief ([Democratic Briefing](#)).
- **Mandelson Scandal:** UK Parliament documents reveal Peter Mandelson's ties to Jeffrey Epstein and lies told during his appointment as U.S. Ambassador ([Jones Briefing](#)).
- **BlackRock Infrastructure Summit:** Industry leaders and governors discuss the \$10 trillion gap in U.S. infrastructure and the critical need for "human capital" in skilled trades ([Summit Opening](#)).
- **AI and Compute Abundance:** Sam Altman discusses the "utility" of intelligence and the massive capital needed for "Stargate" infrastructure ([Altman Interview](#)).
- **U.S. Farm Bankruptcies:** Senator Boozman hearing highlights the "punishing" economic environment for U.S. farmers, with Arkansas leading in bankruptcies ([Ag Hearing](#)).
- **Iranian School Strike:** 110 children reportedly killed by a U.S. Tomahawk missile hit on an Iranian primary school ([Leavitt Briefing](#)).

- **Religious Liberty in Healthcare:** Doctors and nurses testify about being fired for refusing to use "incorrect" pronouns or performing transgender surgeries ([Commission Hearing](#)).
- **Ukraine Child Deportations:** Ukrainian officials report over 19,546 cases of children systematically abducted by Russia as part of "national homicide" ([Atlantic Council Event](#)).
- **TSA Working Without Pay:** Senator Cornyn delivers "token" burgers to TSA agents in Austin who are working without pay during the DHS shutdown ([Airport Confrontation](#)).
- **Supreme Court Purge Claims:** Critics allege the administration is using an "immunity ruling" to purge the FBI and DOJ of investigators who tracked Trump's "ties to Russia" ([Vinci Interview](#)).
- **Erie Canal Bicentennial:** Lectures on the 1825 completion of the Erie Canal, framing it as the \$5.5 million "engineering impossibility" that made New York City a global capital ([Historical Commemoration](#)).
- **Hawaiian Cultural Recovery:** Discussion on the 1960s recovery of voyaging knowledge and the "Wasteland of Rocks" (Chiricahua) becoming a National Park ([Lectures in History](#)).
- **Minnesota Medicaid Reform:** Governor Tim Walz holds a press conference on a "bold new effort" to centralize Medicaid administration and use AI to combat fraud ([Walz Briefing](#)).

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.

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