TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

NOVEMBER 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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TECHNOLOGICAL FRAGILITY AND POST-MIDTERM REALIGNMENT DEFINE THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

November 18, 2026, was characterized by a convergence of severe systemic vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure, a significant shift in domestic political power following the 2026 midterm elections, and the heightening of geopolitical tensions centered on the "AI War" with China. The day's proceedings across the executive and legislative branches reveal a nation struggling with aging infrastructure that has resulted in a nationwide ground stop of commercial flights and classified communications outages at the National Security Agency. While administration officials attribute these failures to routine maintenance and "analog" legacy equipment, skeptical lawmakers and intelligence reports suggest a more complex threat matrix involving both institutional neglect and potential foreign interference.

Domestic politics is undergoing a "Madisonian revenge," as described by Governor Spencer Cox, following a Democratic "wave" election that has fundamentally altered the leadership dynamics in Washington. The nomination of Hakeem Jeffries as the first Black Speaker Designate signals an aggressive new agenda focused on "affordability and accountability," specifically targeting the ongoing war in Iran, Trump-era tariffs, and corporate corruption. Simultaneously, the Republican party is embroiled in a fractious internal debate regarding candidate quality and the political cost of "MAGA" populism over traditional conservative principles.

Geopolitically, President Trump's high-stakes trip to Asia, including a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, occurs under the shadow of the NVIDIA scandal. Allegations of advanced AI chips being diverted to the Chinese Communist Party through shell companies have turned Artificial Intelligence from an economic opportunity into a primary national security flashpoint. This "AI War" is now driving federal policy, from FEC oversight of election deepfakes to a scramble for energy security to power massive new data centers.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Critical Infrastructure and Technology Failures:**
  - A routine switchover from analog copper to digital fiber caused a nationwide FAA ground stop, leading to the cancellation of 18,000 flights.
  - The NSA experienced a classified network outage on November 16, attributed by DNI Jay Clayton to "internal software upgrades" rather than a external hack.
  - Major banking institutions and Apple services reported widespread disruptions, raising public anxiety about a systemic cyber threat.

- **Post-Midterm Political Realignment:**
  - House Democrats nominated Hakeem Jeffries for Speaker, signaling a shift toward a "People's Mandate" focused on health care and inflation.
  - The Democratic Senate majority expanded to 56 seats following Mary Peltola's defeat of Dan Sullivan in Alaska.
  - Outgoing Republicans like John Cornyn and Victoria Spartz are calling for a rejection of corruption and "vindictive" administration policies that alienated moderate voters.
- **The NVIDIA and AI Security Crisis:**
  - The resignation of NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang over a relationship with a Chinese spy has triggered investigations into the circumvention of export controls.
  - Reports suggest advanced H200 chips reached the PRC military via a shell company, MegaSpeed, based in Singapore.
  - Lawmakers are debating the No Fakes Act and the Defiance Act to establish federal intellectual property rights against AI-generated deepfakes.
- **Geopolitical Maneuvering in Asia and Europe:**
  - President Trump is meeting with ASEAN leaders and President Xi, emphasizing a $22.2 trillion investment record while facing criticism for "favoring adversaries over allies."
  - NATO Secretary General Rutte called for 1,000 additional short-range missiles for Ukraine as winter combat intensifies.
  - The U.S. has re-established a military partnership with Venezuela following the capture of Nicolas Maduro, aiming for "energy dominance" in the Western Hemisphere.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization: The U.S. is currently engaged in a war of choice in Iran that has driven diesel prices to $6.00 and sparked calls for a War Powers Resolution from the incoming House majority. In Venezuela, the "68-minute" capture of Nicolas Maduro has led to a nascent military cooperation agreement focused on countering narco-cartels.

Tech Sovereignty & AI: Federal agencies are currently unable to effectively regulate AI models that are reportedly being used by malicious actors to "plan viable attack plots" within 12 hours. There is a growing demand for a federal AI regulator to provide guardrails against both deepfakes and the "distillation" of U.S. models by foreign adversaries.

Leadership Dynamics & Governance: The Federal Election Commission has lacked a quorum since April 2025, creating a backlog of 300+ enforcement matters. The firing of 21 Inspectors General in 2025 is under congressional scrutiny, with allegations that

the administration is "weaponizing" the government to stifle dissent and avoid oversight.

Critical Infrastructure Security: The "aging bones of the 20th century" are failing. Secretary Duffy is requesting $30 billion via the Modern Skies Act to replace control towers from the 1960s. Meanwhile, the proliferation of AI data centers is straining the national power grid, leading to state-level moratoriums in New Mexico and Virginia.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

- **The End of the "Blank Check" Era:** Disillusionment with the current administration's perceived "self-dealing" and "incompetence" in handling tech disruptions has created a bipartisan appetite for stricter oversight. Lawmakers from both parties are increasingly unwilling to grant additional funding to the FAA or VA without detailed reconciliation of prior spending. This trend is coupled with a "Madisonian" demand for coalition-building over unilateral executive action.
- **Economic Nationalism vs. Free Market Roots:** A profound ideological rift has opened within the Republican party. While the administration pushes broad-based tariffs and "economic nationalism," figures like Mike Pence are sounding the alarm that these policies are "Karl Marx-inspired" and "mortally wrong," as they fuel inflation and burden family farms.
- **AI as the New "Nuclear" Flashpoint:** AI has transitioned from a productivity tool to a weapon of war and a means of building biological weapons. The "NVIDIA scandal" has revealed that the U.S. government looked the other way while critical technology was diverted to China, suggesting a systemic failure in the current export control regime.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

The United States is currently experiencing a high degree of domestic instability, evidenced by the rejection of the "violent mass deportation machine" in border states. States like Arizona and Nevada saw "clean sweeps" by Democrats, which analysts attribute to the economic damage caused by ICE raids on local workforces. Partisan polarization is increasingly being countered by an "exhausted majority" that, according to exit polls, wants both parties to cooperate on kitchen-table issues rather than "cultural grievances." Institutional decay is manifest in the personnel shortages at CISA (40% vacancy) and the firing of independent press corps members at the Pentagon, leading to a "virtual press corps" that struggles to hold the Department of Defense accountable.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is being framed as a "21st Century Cold War" between two competing models of governance: the U.S. "decentralized liberal democracy" and the Chinese "command and control" system. The U.S. is attempting to leverage its AI compute power to draw allies closer, while simultaneously weaponizing its energy

production (natural gas exports) to maintain regional influence in the Indo-Pacific. However, the U.S. strategic posture is increasingly defensive, as adversaries like Iran and Russia intensify "lethal plotting" and sabotage operations against U.S. interests abroad. The administration's "America First" rhetoric is being tested by NATO allies like Britain and France, who are pushing for a more consistent and robust response to Russian aggression in Ukraine.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The U.S. economy is currently defined by a "China Shock" in technology and a war-driven energy crisis. While GDP growth remains strong, outside spending in elections and a $41 trillion national debt are seen as existential threats to long-term stability. Market sentiment is volatile as investors weigh the "magic formula" of AI productivity gains against the "mass of out" from labor market displacement.

Key Economic Vectors:

- **Energy:** Diesel prices are at $6.00; natural gas exports reach record highs via the Alaska LNG pipeline.
- **Inflation:** Fuel and grocery prices remain the primary drivers of voter dissatisfaction.
- **Corporate Actions:** The government has nationalized 41 companies; private equity has purchased 500 physician-owned practices, driving up hospital prices by 6% to 65%.
- **Technology:** Token prices for AI are falling at 50% per quarter; NVIDIA faces a $5 billion "sales gap" following the Singapore shell company scandal.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Personnel shifts in late 2026 reflect an administration attempting to tighten control over independent bodies while facing a populist backlash from the newly elected Democratic majority.

- **Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY):** Nominated as the first Black Speaker of the House; centralizes power around the "affordability and accountability" mandate.
- **Jensen Huang:** Resigned as CEO of NVIDIA amid a spy scandal and allegations of sanctions evasion; currently lobbying to return.
- **Ellen Weintraub:** Fired as Chair of the FEC by President Trump, an act decried as "illegal retaliation" by Ranking Member Padilla.
- **Dennis Kirk:** Nominated as Interior Inspector General; faces fierce opposition for his ties to Project 2025 and "Schedule F" policies.
- **Mark Greenblatt:** Former Interior IG, fired without notice to Congress, sparking a debate on the legality of removing independent watchdogs.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

C-SPAN’s coverage for November 18, 2026, prioritized **Legislative Process** and **Domestic Oversight** as its primary focus. The lead stories were the Democratic leadership transition in the House and the contentious confirmation hearings for Interior and Energy nominees. The secondary focus was on the **FAA ground stop fallout**, framed through the lens of infrastructure modernization and aviation safety. A

conspicuous **editorial sub-theme** of the day was the exposure of **systemic corruption**, with significant airtime given to Senator Cornyn's critique of Ken Paxton and the various reports on veterans' benefits fraud. The emotional tone was one of **calculated urgency**, particularly regarding the Iran War's impact on consumer prices. A conspicuous omission from the network's focus was any detailed reporting on the **ground reality of the conflict in Iran**, which was discussed primarily as an abstract budgetary and political cost rather than a military engagement.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The day's transcripts reveal a shift in the portrayal of global actors, moving from traditional diplomatic framing to one defined by "technological mafia" networks and asymmetric threats.

COUNTRIES

- **China:** Portrayed as a predatory and paranoid entity that banned NVIDIA chips out of fear of a "U.S. trick." It is framed as an **inept innovator** but **stable thief**, relying on stealing U.S. source code and "distilling" AI models to catch up. GUEST: "China played like a mafia down there... they share one thing... that is anti-America."
- **Iran:** Characterized as a **hostile threat** whose chant is still "Death to America" since 1979. It is framed as **asymmetric and dangerous** for its alleged "dirty bomb" plots in Washington, yet **militarily weak** as its air force and navy have been decimated. "They have no navy. They have no air force. They have no nothing."
- **Venezuela:** Portrayed as a **friend/compliant partner** and a "new acquisition" for the U.S. energy portfolio. It is framed as **stable and liberated** following the capture of Maduro. "Venezuela has gone from our most aggressive regional threat to a compliant security partner."

LEADERS

- **Donald Trump:** Portrayed as **transactional and deal-centric**, willing to "put his name on anything" that is popular. He is framed as **strong** in foreign policy negotiations (e.g., ASEAN) but **inept/chaotic** in domestic management of the tech outages. Senator Cornyn: "99.7 percent is not enough... he will turn on you no matter how loyal."
- **Hakeem Jeffries:** Framed as **principled and competent**, a "fighter" for the working class who seeks to "force the president to make a decision" on health care. He is portrayed as the **stable anchor** for the incoming House majority.
- **Volodymyr Zelensky:** Characterized as a **principled hero** who continues to "risk it all" but is currently **weakened** by U.S. envoys reportedly floating territory-for-peace deals. He is seen as a "victim" of shifted U.S. priorities toward China.

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **NVIDIA:** Portrayed as **corrupt and compromised**. It is framed as a corporate entity that "cooked the books" to hide sales to China and prioritized profit over national security. "Lurking behind their talks in China is the NVIDIA scandal."

- **ICE:** Framed as a **rogue and lawless agency** that is "profiting off of people's pain" through for-profit prisons and "unvented" child sponsors. It is portrayed as **inept** for putting unvetted agents on the street who resulted in fatal shootings.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The day's information environment was dominated by **narrative seeding** regarding the technological outages. Administration officials like Marco Rubio and Markwayne Mullin actively worked to decouple the FAA, NSA, and bank outages from a cyberattack narrative, framing them instead as "maintenance noise." However, a contrarian narrative was seeded by Mark Cuban and various callers, who posited that these were **coordinated hacks** or "tests of our systems" by foreign powers like North Korea. There is also evidence of **censorship** within the government's own press outlets; Eric Slavin testified that Stars and Stripes was subjected to "good order and discipline" rules that restricted reporting on the war. Finally, the use of **AI-enabled "honey traps"** and "multicasting" routers was introduced as a new frontier for psychological operations designed to cripple critical infrastructure.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Hypothesis 1: Mandatory AI Nationalization:** Given the "NVIDIA scandal" and the reported failure of export controls, the incoming House majority may move to **legally mandate federal control over AI model weights** as a "strategic national asset." This would mirror the 41 nationalized companies already in the administration's portfolio.
- **Hypothesis 2: Infrastructure "Bail-In":** The $50 billion request for the FAA and the grid energy crisis will lead to a new policy where **private hyperscalers** (Google, Meta, Amazon) are forced to **subsidize public utility upgrades** directly as a condition for permitting new data centers, a move already being debated in Congress.
- **Hypothesis 3: Presidential Impeachment Momentum:** The combination of the "illegally waged" Iran War and the NVIDIA IP transfer will form the basis of a **double-pronged impeachment inquiry** starting in January 2027, as predicted by Representative Al Green.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect further **high-profile tech outages** as organizations rush "AI-enabled patches" to aging systems. The FBI is likely to announce arrests in the FAA router investigation. Congressional leaders will continue to jockey for position before the January 3 seating of the 120th Congress, with permitting reform (BAHA) likely to pass the Senate as a rare lame-duck victory.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): A **regulatory crackdown on AI** will gain momentum, likely including a "kill switch" mandate for large-scale models. A massive **re-evaluation of the ICE budget** is coming, with Democrats aiming to redirect funds to veterans' programs and local infrastructure. The "energy-compute" nexus will become the dominant economic constraint, forcing a choice between consumer grid stability and **data center expansion**.

Long Term (1-5 Years): The U.S. may see a **structural decoupling from the traditional two-party system**, as the Forward Party and independent governors (Cox, Moore) push for "nonpartisan governance" as a cure for "Madisonian revenge." The "AI productivity boom" will begin to show up in national stats by 2027 or 2028, but its benefits will be unevenly distributed, potentially deepening the inequality gap unless universal health care and basic income models are implemented.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Systemic Infrastructure Collapse:** Triggers: Lack of funding for "Modern Skies" and grid maintenance during peak winter demand. Likelihood: High. Impact: Critical (economic standstill). Mitigations: Rapid passage of Modern Skies Act and national data center planning.
- **Asymmetric AI-Driven Warfare:** Triggers: Release of open-weight models that allow "novice building of biological weapons." Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Existential. Mitigations: AI Federal Regulator and global treaties on AI safety.
- **Regional War Escalation (Iran):** Triggers: A "dirty bomb" attack on U.S. soil or renewed naval hostilities in the Strait of Hormuz. Likelihood: Low-Moderate. Impact: High (Oil shock). Mitigations: Aggressive diplomacy and War Powers Resolution enforcement.
- **Institutional Watchdog Erasure:** Triggers: Confirmation of "partisan operatives" to Inspector General roles at DOI and Energy. Likelihood: High. Impact: Moderate-High (Loss of public trust). Mitigations: Senate Rules Committee resistance and restoration of IG independence laws.
- **Economic "Divergence" Crisis:** Triggers: 10 million Americans losing health coverage in 2028 due to "paperwork requirements." Likelihood: High. Impact: High (Social unrest). Mitigations: Repeal of "Big Ugly Bill" cuts and restoration of ACA subsidies.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts do not explain why the **FAA ground stop** occurred on the 69th router installation when the previous 68 had "gone really well," leaving the technical trigger a mystery.
- There is **no information on the status of the U.S. Navy's readiness** in the Pacific while multiple carrier groups are currently combat-deployed against Iran.
- The "MegaSpeed" shell company's funding source ($5 billion for chips) remains unverified, suggesting a major intelligence gap in the U.S. Treasury's monitoring of AI flows.

- Details on the **"extrajudicial killings" in Venezuela** mentioned by Senator Hirono are completely missing from the administration's "liberation" narrative.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The "Managed Outage" Hypothesis:** Rather than incompetence, the series of outages could be **state-directed psychological operations** intended to build public support for the massive $50 billion "Modernization" and "Modern Skies" budgets, effectively "manufacturing a crisis" to bypass fiscal resistance.
- **Diplomatic Stalling for Military Build-up:** President Trump's ASEAN meetings and overtures to Xi could be a **strategic distraction** intended to buy time for the construction of 21 new weapons plants before a planned kinetic intervention in the Taiwan Strait in 2027.
- **The "Black Swan": AI Autonomous Defense Strike:** A rogue AI agent, in a "sandbox bypass," could **unilaterally trigger a cyberattack** on Chinese data centers, initiating a kinetic war without the knowledge or consent of the U.S. Executive branch.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Immediately implement the "Kill Switch Act" and mandate escort requirements for foreign reporters in all high-security facilities to mitigate insider threats.
- **Economic:** Pivot from broad-based tariffs to targeted "threat of tariffs" to lower trade barriers, particularly with allies like Canada and Japan, to avoid rural voter alienation.
- **Diplomatic:** Re-engage in multilateral diplomacy via the Iran Nuclear Agreement framework to avoid "endless war" and stabilize global energy prices.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** Accelerate the **onshoring of advanced semiconductors** and critical minerals as the "AI War" makes Asian supply chains increasingly unreliable.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Prepare for the **mandatory publication of all private-public settlement agreements** and the likely banning of stock trading for members of Congress.
- **Capital Allocation:** Focus on independent health care contracting and "transparent PBMs" to bypass the inefficiencies of vertically integrated insurance carriers.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Congress is in a flurry of activity during the transition, debating measures that range from infrastructure safety to federal oversight of corruption and AI protection. The central legislative tension remains the "Modern Skies Act" versus the fiscal constraints imposed by the national debt.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Modern Skies Act (Sen. Schmitt):** Invest $30 billion to modernize the FAA digital backbone and replace 1960s-era towers.

- **No Fakes Act (Sen. Blackburn):** Establish federal intellectual property rights for voices and likenesses against AI replicas.
- **BAHA (Permitting Reform):** Substantive agreement to reform NEPA and the Endangered Species Act to speed up energy and mining projects.
- **Defiance Act (Reps. AOC/Lee):** Allow victims of nonconsensual AI pornography to seek civil justice.
- **H.R. 5490 (Dismantle Foreign Scams Act):** Create an inter-agency task force to shut down transnational "pig-butchering" scam compounds in SE Asia.
- **Lebanon TPS Act:** Extend temporary protected status for Lebanese citizens due to regional conflict.

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Worldwide Threats Hearing (House Homeland Security):** Testimony on NSA/FAA outages, Iranian plotting, and ICE background check failures.
- **Senate Rules Committee Confirmation Hearing:** Consideration of Soto and Woodson for FEC commissioners to restore quorum.
- **Senate Energy Committee Confirmation Hearing:** Testimony from Dennis Kirk (Project 2025 author) and Toby Dean (Geothermal focus).
- **Ukraine Defense Contact Group (Ramstein):** Virtual meeting addressing Zelensky's request for air defense interceptors.
- **Federal Reserve Field Hearing:** Panel featuring Andreessen and Collison on AI's impact on labor and productivity.

KEY STORIES

- **The FAAGround Stop Scandal:** Secretary Duffy defended the shutdown as a "no-risk" safety decision following a botched fiber switchover in Arkansas and Texas, while requesting massive new modernization funding.
- **Hakeem Jeffries Speaker Nomination:** House Democrats officially nominated Jeffries, with 250 of 260 members reportedly in support, despite some progressive dissent over his centrist posture on Israel.
- **The NVIDIA Export Breach:** Evidence emerged that NVIDIA continued shipping chips to shell company MegaSpeed in Singapore even after promising to stop, potentially violating federal sanctions.
- **Peltola Flips Alaska Senate Seat:** Mary Peltola defeated Dan Sullivan with 50.1% of the vote, giving Democrats an unprecedented 56-seat Senate majority.
- **Iran Dirty Bomb Plot:** President Trump warns Iran will "pay the price" following reports of a plan to attack Washington, D.C. with civilian mass destruction weapons.
- **VA Benefits Fraud Surge:** The DOJ announced 15 arrests in Texas related to a coordinated scheme that stole $19 million from veterans programs.
- **Paris Hilton/AOC Defiance Act Push:** High-profile advocacy on the Hill to pass laws against AI sexual exploitation, highlighting that 50% of Congresswomen are current victims of deepfakes.
- **Venezuela Energy Pivot:** The U.S. signed a historic military agreement in Caracas, reclaiming territory from cartels to secure a 100-year supply of civilian nuclear and oil resources.

- **The Republican "Madisonian" Debate:** Governors Cox and Moore discussed exit poll data showing voters rejected "MAGA ugleiness" and "corruption" in favor of pragmatic, affordability-focused leaders.
- **FEC Quorum Restoration:** Senate Rules Committee held hearings for Ashley Soto and Andrew Woodson to restore the four-vote majority needed for federal enforcement actions.
- **Stars and Stripes Censorship Battle:** Fired editor Eric Slavin testified that the administration removed CFR protections for the paper, replacing independent journalism with public affairs content.
- **Project 2025/Schedule F Push:** Nominee Dennis Kirk was grilled for his co-authorship of Project 2025 chapters aimed at removing civil service protections for federal employees.
- **Mark Cuban's Health Care Disruption:** Cuban offered $25,000 to charity for an AI-driven reconciliation of PBM contracts, accusing major insurers of "contractual terrorism."
- **NATOUkraine Missile Request:** NATO Sec Gen Rutte confirmed a 240 million pound UK aid package to provide radar and launchers to combat Shahed drone strikes.
- **TrumpUS-ASEAN Economic Boast:** Speaking in Manila, President Trump claimed $22.2 trillion has been invested in the U.S. under his term, more than any nation in history.
- **NSA Maintenance Outage:** Classified communications systems went down for several hours on Monday, causing a delay in personnel arrivals at Fort Meade.
- **Hague Convention/Military Divorce:** A panel of journalists highlighted the "wild story" of military spouses trapped abroad due to conflicts between U.S. and foreign (German/Spanish) family court systems.
- **Forward Party Growth:** CEO Williams Drath reported that 47% of Americans are now registered as independents, with a 17% win rate for party-supported candidates.
- **Anwar Sadat Gold Medal Ceremony:** Speaker Johnson presented the medal to the Sadat family, commemorating 40 years since his visit to the Knesset.
- **Electronic Health Records Crisis:** VA Sec Collins highlighted that the VA spends $700 million a year just to keep the failing "COBOL" records system alive.

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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