



Week Ending 2-20-26

Volume 26 | Issue 9

This Week in Congress!

This week, the House voted on three bills: the Deporting Fraudsters Act (H.R. 1958), which would make aliens convicted of defrauding the U.S. government or unlawfully receiving public benefits inadmissible and deportable; the BOWWOW Act (H.R. 4638), which would apply the same standard to those convicted of harming law-enforcement animals; and the Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act (H.R. 556), which would restrict the use of lead ammunition and tackle on federal lands and waters.

The House also considered 17 additional measures, most related to federal land management, communications facilities, ocean data collection, and Grand Canyon fire recovery. These included two Senate-passed bills to reauthorize the SBIR and STTR programs (S. 3971) and to limit defenses under the Holocaust Expropriated Art Recovery Act (S. 1884), as well as legislation to sanction foreign entities involved in Iran's oil sector (H.R. 1422) and a joint resolution proposing a balanced budget amendment (H.J. Res. 139).

In the Senate, lawmakers voted on Trump administration nominees and spent most of the week debating the SAVE America Act (S. 3752), with proceedings interrupted by consideration of an Iran War Powers resolution.

Republican Senators Urge Trump Administration to Suspend the Heat Injury Prevention Proposed Rule

Sen. Cassidy (R-LA) was joined by Sens. Risch (R-ID), Tillis (R-NC), Tuberville (R-AL), Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Lankford (R-OK), Johnson (R-WI), Schmitt (R-MO), Banks (R-IN), Crapo (R-ID), Britt (R-AL), Ernst (R-IA), Budd (R-NC), Cornyn (R-TX), Sheehy (R-MT), and Daines (R-MT) urging the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to revise the proposed heat rule as it would mandate that all businesses, no matter their safety record, size, location, or industry, comply with requirements on safety staffing, recordkeeping and mandatory breaks at high-heat triggers that can create dangerous hazards for some workers. Per their letter, "the one size fits all proposal is inefficient, dangerous, threatens job opportunities, and hurts local businesses." More specifically, their letter suggests the DOL reconsider the mandatory rest breaks, ambiguity around the heat safety coordinators, rigid acclimatization policies, and more, if the agency moves forward with the rulemaking.

DOL's Guidance on Apprentices Programs

The Department of Labor's (DOL) latest guidance, intended to reduce administrative complexity for employers initiating registered apprentice programs, may not be sufficient to meet the administration's ambitious job creation targets. The three guidance documents released last week informed businesses that they are not required to comply with rigid standards regarding apprenticeship program durations and clarified expectations for state governments' involvement in expanding participant numbers.

However, workforce development professionals indicate that the guidance does not address fundamental challenges facing the apprenticeship program, which continues to limit its broader adoption. This marks the administration's initial phase of updated guidance pertaining to apprenticeship

structures, an area some employers have found prohibitively complex. President Trump, in an April executive order, stated his objective was to enroll one million new registered apprentices. Additionally, the release of these documents coincided with the announcement of state-targeted grant awards designed to stimulate the development of apprenticeships in sectors such as artificial intelligence, information technology, and health care.

House Republican Legislative Priorities

At their recent policy retreat, House Republican leaders and the President discussed legislative priorities for the year. Speaker Johnson emphasized renewing section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act before its expiration on April 20, advancing water infrastructure, a small farm bill, and pursuing a second tax and spending package through budget reconciliation. Members explored possible reconciliation measures, including addressing federal fraud and funding related to the Iran war, while some pitched ideas like reclaiming unspent COVID funds, scaling back climate initiatives, penalizing states with SNAP errors, charging new electric vehicle owners, and increasing oversight of government charge cards.

President Trump focused on passing the SAVE America Act, calling for stricter voting requirements and amendments banning most mail-in ballots, restricting transgender athletes in women's sports, and prohibiting gender-affirming surgery for minors. He did not address cost-of-living legislation or pending housing bills, maintaining that affordability is not a voter concern. The Senate-passed housing bill faces opposition, and amendment attempts in the House. Additionally, no second budget reconciliation bill was mentioned, and the Treasury signaled it will not release a Greenbook of revenue proposals, indicating lower priority for new tax and spending legislation.

SAVE America Act

The Senate was scheduled to consider the SAVE America Act this week. However, due to unified opposition from Democratic members and some Republicans, the bill is unlikely to advance. The President, along with certain conservative members, has suggested that Senate Republicans utilize an untested parliamentary approach known as the talking filibuster to potentially facilitate passage of the bill. Majority Leader Thune (R-SD) has strongly dismissed this strategy, citing its procedural complexity, the extensive time commitment required, and the lack of sufficient support within the Republican caucus.

Instead, Republican leadership is preparing for extended debate sessions, which may continue into the following week. This approach is intended to demonstrate to their constituents the party's commitment to advancing the bill and to place political pressure on Democrats regarding election security issues. Prolonged debate will require senators to remain on the Senate floor late into the evenings, minimizing opportunities for procedural maneuvers by the opposition. Leader Thune intends to call votes on amendments reflecting the President's preferred changes; these measures are not expected to secure the necessary 60 votes. The bill's most dedicated proponents have expressed an intention to pursue a vote on amending Senate rules to eliminate the filibuster, but this effort is also anticipated to be unsuccessful. Ultimately, it is expected that a cloture motion will be brought forward to proceed to a final vote on the bill, but it is unlikely to achieve the required 60 votes, thereby concluding the legislative process.

In the House, Rep. Luna (R-FL) has announced her intention to incorporate the SAVE America Act into the forthcoming FISA reauthorization bill. Given the high priority placed on this legislation by the President and the party base, additional members may attempt to attach it to other must-pass bills. Some

lawmakers have indicated they may withhold support for unrelated Senate legislation outside of DHS funding in response.

Additional War Powers Resolutions

Senate Democrats have vowed to jam up the Senate floor with additional War Powers resolutions unless Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth testify publicly about the war in Iran. Those resolutions are privileged, so if they are brought up while the Senate is debating the SAVE America Act, they will take precedence.

Department of Homeland Security Funding

The Department of Homeland Security has been unfunded since February 14 as neither party's bill can secure 60 Senate votes. Democrats have yet to respond to the White House's immigration reform proposal. TSA employees missed their first full paycheck, causing longer airport security lines.

National Debt Tops \$39 Trillion

The Treasury Department reported on Wednesday that the national debt hit a new record high at just over \$39 trillion. The debt reached \$38 trillion back on October 22, 2025, which means another \$1 trillion was added in just under five months.