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Shutdown threat weighs on Senate lunches

By CALEN RAZOR, MIA MCCARTHY and BENJAMIN GUGGENHEIM | 01/28/2026 04:50 AM EST

Presented by



IN TODAY'S EDITION:

- Thune: Plan B is TBD
- Kaine: A Noem replacement could be worse
- Musk is back

Senate Republicans and Democrats will head into separate lunches today for their first in-person conference meetings on how to avoid a partial shutdown at the end of the week.

No one wants to see the vast majority of federal agency funding lapse at 12:01 a.m. Saturday. But partisan divisions over the Homeland Security bill are reaching the brink amid a weather-shortened week.

Senators have a few days to turn the tide.

— **DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS:** Democrats expect to come out of lunch with a firmer wish list of policy changes they want incorporated into the Homeland bill.

“**The things** that we care most about are getting an independent investigation and ending these roving patrols that are terrorizing Minneapolis,” said Sen. **Chris Murphy**, the top Democrat on the Homeland funding panel. “And solving these problems [with] secret police and getting some identification of body cams.”

A new polling memo circulating among senators, obtained by POLITICO, is providing some encouragement for Democrats. The Searchlight Institute found that “bipartisan majorities of voters oppose ICE’s lawless tactics, including detaining U.S. citizens (73 percent), entering people’s homes without warrants (79 percent), and failing to wear clearly identifying uniforms (70 percent),” [Adam Wren reports](#).

— **GOP LOOKS TO THE WHITE HOUSE:** Republicans are trying to come up with alternative solutions to address frustrations with President **Donald Trump**’s aggressive immigration enforcement agenda.

Majority Leader John Thune told reporters he’s encouraging dialogue between the administration and Senate Democrats to reach “some mechanism whereby you don’t have to change the bill or split it out and have to send something back to the House.” He acknowledged members of his own conference would block any attempt to strip DHS funding from the six-bill appropriations package.

Appropriations Chair Susan Collins said Tuesday she’s also hoping for an off-ramp via executive action. The Maine Republican is in the [middle of the fight](#) to hold the funding package together as she navigates a DHS enforcement surge in her own state and a likely reelection campaign, Jordain Carney, Katherine Tully-McManus and Jennifer Scholtes report.

— **WILL THE HOUSE RETURN?:** Democrats want House leaders to bring the chamber back from recess to be ready to pass amended legislation — but Republicans say they have no plans to do so. One senior House Democrat told Meredith Lee Hill it “seems inevitable

at this point the House will be involved” and doubted the administration could do anything to convince Senate Democrats to pass the bill in its current form.

“**I know the House** loves recess — they do,” Murphy said. “The House does not like doing their jobs, but sometimes they might actually have to show up when the country is exploding.”

The Senate will vote Thursday on advancing the six-bill package as is. Thune said it’s “to be determined” what happens if that vote fails.

GOOD WEDNESDAY MORNING. Email us: crazor@politico.com, mmccarthy@politico.com and bguggenheim@politico.com. Follow our live coverage at politico.com/congress.

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WHAT WE'RE WATCHING

With help from Alec Snyder

The **House** is out.

The **Senate** will return at 11 a.m.

— **Senate Foreign Relations** will hear testimony from Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** on U.S. intervention in Venezuela at 10 a.m.

— **Senate Environment and Public Works** will hold a hearing examining the federal environmental review and permitting process at 10 a.m.

— **Republican** and **Democratic** senators will have weekly lunches around 12:30 p.m.

Other action around the Hill: Treasury will hold an 8:30 a.m. event in downtown Washington ahead of the Trump Accounts launch. Speakers include President **Donald Trump**, Treasury Secretary **Scott Bessent**, Sen. **Ted Cruz**, House Ways and Means Chair **Jason Smith**, rapper **Nicki Minaj** and “Shark Tank” investor **Kevin O’Leary**.

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THE LEADERSHIP SUITE

Musk’s SAVE Act campaign puts pressure on Thune

Elon Musk is back on the political scene — and he’s building up pressure on Thune to take up a doomed bill targeted at preventing noncitizens from voting, Meredith reports with Mia and Jordain.

After a temporary but messy public rift with Trump last summer, Musk is back cutting checks to boost Republicans and using his 223-million-follower X account to influence policy.

Musk has been on a weekslong campaign to pass the SAVE Act, which would require proof of citizenship when registering to vote and lacks the Democratic support needed to pass the Senate.

Asked about the bill, Thune said it will come up for a Senate vote “at some point” but “we’ll have to figure out where we can get it done.”

“We’ve got a lot of interest in it, and I’m supportive of it,” Thune said, noting he has co-sponsored the bill previously.

Sens. **John Cornyn** and **Bill Cassidy**, two of the Senate's most endangered Republican incumbents, have leaned into Musk's push and often repost the billionaire's messages on their social accounts. Cornyn also spoke privately with Thune about the SAVE Act last week.

The Senate and Noem: It's complicated

Thune declined to say Tuesday whether he had confidence in Homeland Security Secretary **Kristi Noem** after Sens. **Thom Tillis** and **Lisa Murkowski** became the first GOP lawmakers to call for her ouster.

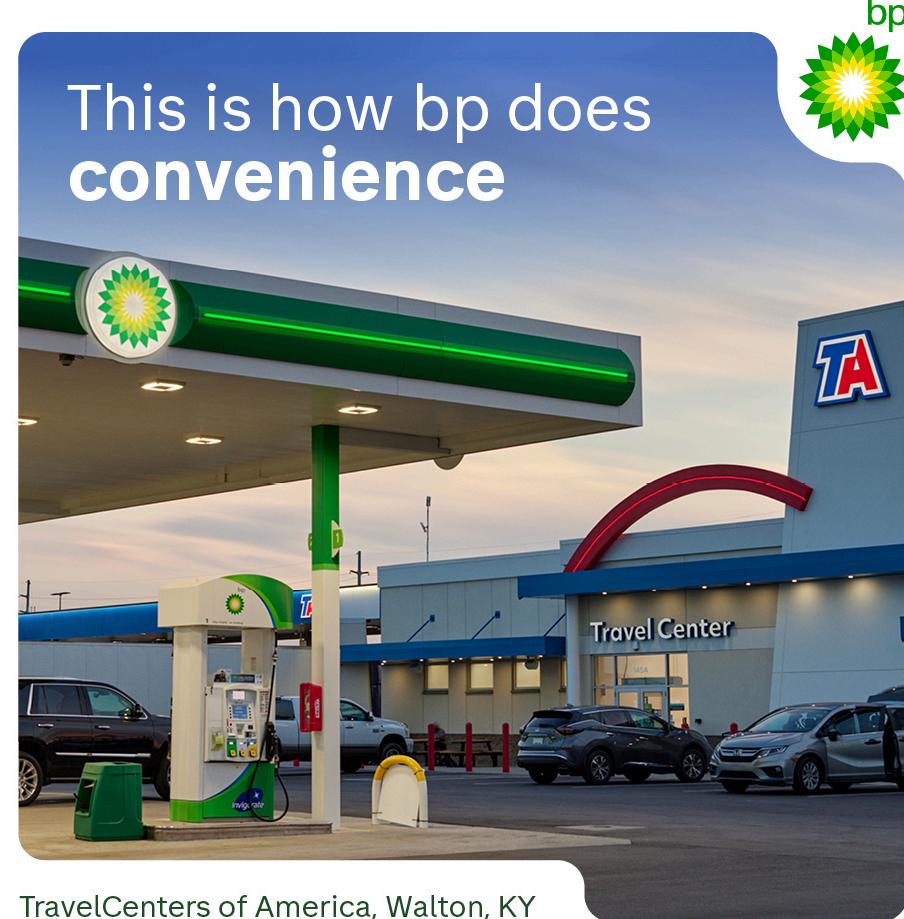
“That’s the president’s judgment call,” Thune told reporters when asked about Noem, a fellow South Dakota native who served with him in the state’s congressional delegation.

The state’s other senator, **Mike Rounds**, also demurred, telling reporters Noem “serves at the pleasure of the president.”

Some Senate Democrats are withholding calls for her resignation. Sen. **Tim Kaine**, who voted to confirm Noem, argued that forcing her out would not fix the department — and that her replacement could be worse.

“I don’t want a DHS Secretary Steve Miller,” Kaine said, referring to Trump’s deputy chief of staff and Homeland Security adviser **Stephen Miller**. “That would not be sufficient. Just her resignation would not be sufficient.”

A message from bp:



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POLICY RUNDOWN

ACA COMPROMISE COMING SOON? — Sen. **Angus King** told Benjamin Tuesday that he's expecting the bipartisan group working to revive expired Affordable Care Act subsidies to release bill text "hopefully in the next day or so."

"We should have the text," said King, one of the key negotiators. King said he believes the bipartisan group landed on a deal that Republicans and Democrats will accept.

The optimism comes after Sen. **Bernie Moreno**, one of the lead GOP negotiators, spoke with senators on the floor Tuesday evening about the health care framework. Democrats in the negotiating group were initially caught off guard by the Ohio Republican's apparent prediction of text Tuesday, since they had neither seen nor signed off on anything, according to two people granted anonymity to discuss the private talks.

Other lawmakers were pessimistic Tuesday about the state of the discussions, which have been overshadowed by the fight over DHS funding after Saturday's fatal shooting of **Alex Pretti**.

"I heard that there was an ember sparked today, but I'm not feeling overly optimistic," Sen. **Lisa Murkowski** told reporters. "As with so much around here, you focus on an issue and then something else pops."

RUBIO TESTIFIES ON VENEZUELA — Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** will appear before Senate Foreign Relations today to give his first public testimony to Congress since the capture of Venezuelan President **Nicolás Maduro**.

"My goal is to understand exactly what their plan is to get to democracy in Venezuela," Sen. **Rick Scott** told Calen.

Sen. **Chris Murphy** said he wants to know "what's going on with the oil money in Venezuela."

"Who is making money off of it?" Murphy told Calen. "I'm sure he'll get a ton of questions in that space."

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THE BEST OF THE REST

[Nevada Republican who negotiated bill that funds ICE says operation needs to 'pivot'](#), from Mini Racker at The Nevada Independent

[Why Jim Clyburn Is Staying in Congress While His Octogenarian Peers Step Back](#), from Daniella Diaz and Riley Rogerson at NOTUS

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bioenergy facilities and trading floors. [See all the ways bp is investing in America.](#)

JOB BOARD

Tamzin Astani is now a policy director at the Bernhardt Group, the lobbying firm founded last year by former Interior Secretary **David Bernhardt**. Astani was previously a professional staff member and deputy coalitions director for House Budget Chair **Jodey Arrington**.

Who's hiring?

Sen. **Peter Welch** is seeking a summer [law clerk](#).

Rep. **Glenn Grothman** is seeking a [scheduler](#).

The minority staff on **House Natural Resources** is seeking a [professional staff member](#).

The **National Alliance to End Homelessness** is seeking a [director of congressional affairs](#).

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TRIVIA

TUESDAY'S ANSWER: This one stumped y'all. Rep. **Melanie Stansbury**'s district got the most snow in the U.S. last weekend, according to the National Weather Service. Bonito Lake, N.M., saw 31 inches.

TODAY'S QUESTION, from Mia: Name the member of Congress who was a co-producer for the film "It Takes Two" starring **Mary-Kate** and **Ashley Olsen**.

The first person to correctly guess gets a mention in the next edition of Inside Congress. Send your answers to insidecongress@politico.com.

CORRECTION: Tuesday's edition misstated the House's plans ahead of a possible shutdown. GOP leaders did not have plans to bring the chamber back early from its recess.

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