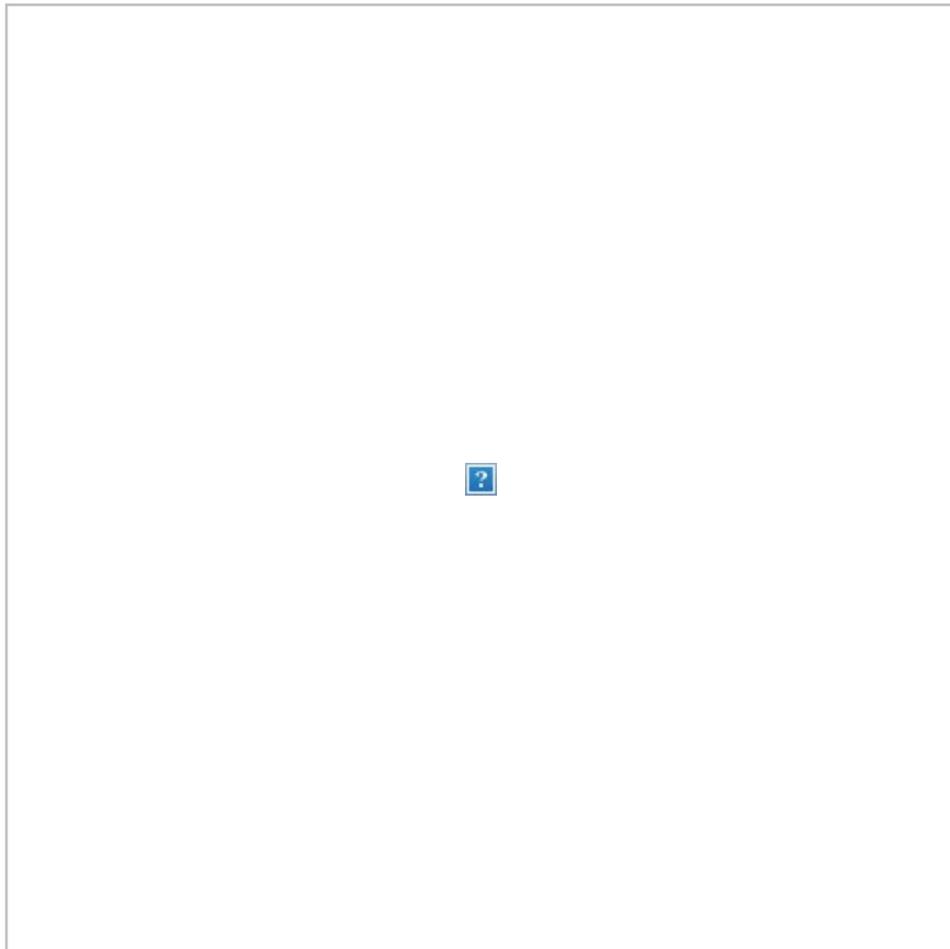
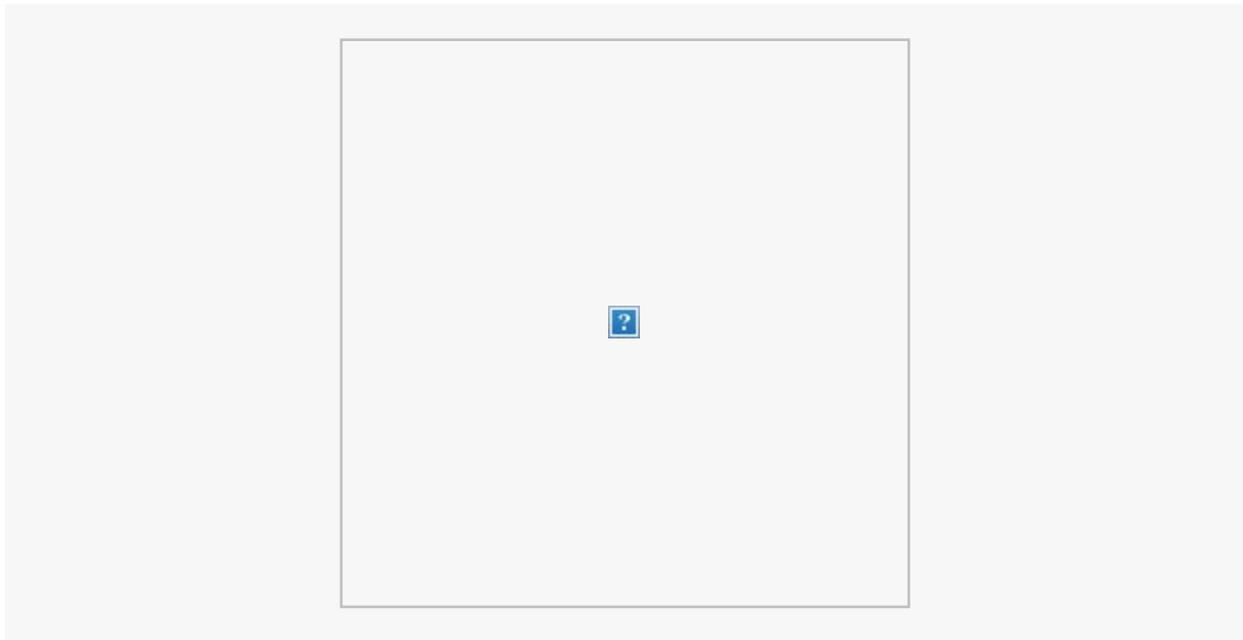


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February 23, 2024

Headlines - Aerospace & Defense - Budget & Economy - Advanced Tech - Military Installations & Communities - Homeland Security - Transportation & Infrastructure - Biotech & Healthcare - Climate & Development

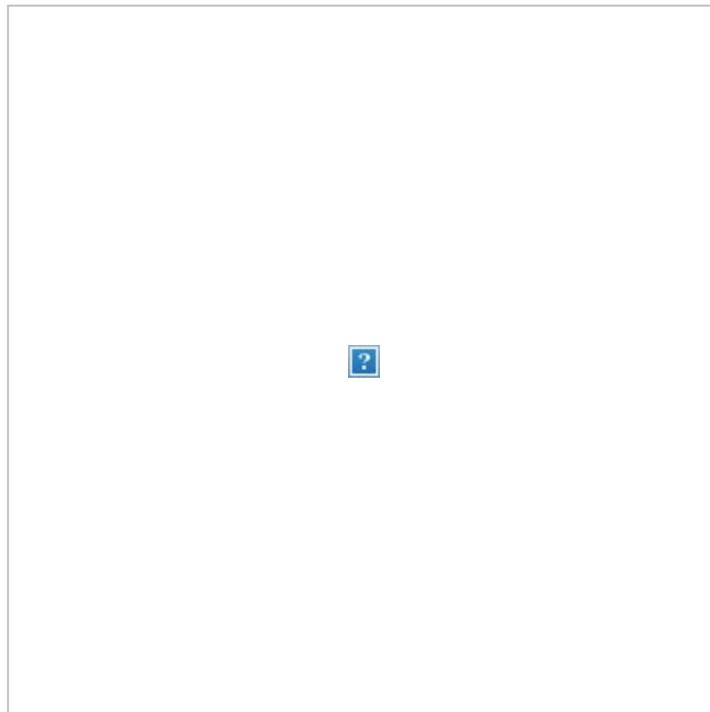
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Notable Headlines

- [4 charged in transporting suspected Iranian-made weapons. 2 SEALs died in intercepting the ship](#)
- [New Tennessee law allows officials to refuse to perform same-sex marriages](#)
- [Houthi missile hits ship in Gulf of Aden as Yemeni rebels continue attacks over Israel-Hamas war](#)
- [Biden administration will impose sanctions on more than 500 targets in response to Navalny death](#)
- [Three Alabama clinics pause IVF services after court rules that embryos are children](#)

Worth reading: [Abortion, AI and Trump: 5 takeaways from POLITICO's Governors Summit](#)

View From The Hill



Both the House and Senate were in recess this week, but there were still noteworthy conversations happening relevant to pending government funding deadlines of March 1st and 8th. Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) took top House GOP leadership, committee chairs, and various faction heads of his conference, collectively known as the “Elected

Leadership Committee,” or “ELC,” to the Mandarin Oriental in Miami for a strategic retreat. The trip was aimed at plotting the legislative agenda for the rest of the year and focusing on how to grow and maintain the majority in November’s elections. However, the warm weather [failed](#) to allay internal bickering that has plagued House Republicans throughout the 118th Congress, as senior Members of the conference complained about leadership’s approach, the continuing hardline tactics of the House Freedom Caucus, not to mention the party’s overall inability to move forward on critical funding and policy legislation.

While House and Senate Appropriations Members and staff have mostly settled negotiations on full year spending bills for fiscal year 2024—which began October 1st of last year—there is growing concern across Capitol Hill that Congress may stumble into a government shutdown. While such fears are nothing new in recent years, some House conservatives are outwardly [expressing](#) desire for a full-year continuing resolution (CR) in order to trigger mandatory one percent across-the-board spending cuts for the entire federal government, including the Department of Defense. It remains unclear to what extent Speaker Johnson will risk the right’s ire by putting some combination of full year bills and supplemental funding for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan up for a vote. Conservatives are also advocating for the inclusion of so-called “policy riders” on any government funding bills, which would cost support among Democrats. Regardless of the ultimate strategy, the Speaker will be [forced](#) to rely on Democratic votes to meet the two-thirds vote threshold to move a bill under suspension of normal House Floor rules, as right-flank Members could block a bill going through regular order at the Rules Committee.

Ahead of the anticipated release of the President’s fiscal year 2025 budget in the coming weeks, officials within the Pentagon have been [struggling](#) to adhere to spending requirements enacted by Congress last year. As the Department of Defense anticipates submitting a budget request just under \$850 billion for FY2025, cuts are anticipated to the F-35 program, Virginia-class submarine program, Air Force overhead, Unmanned Aerial Systems programs, among many others.

Aerospace & Defense

[Private US moon lander reaches lunar orbit ahead of touchdown attempt \(Reuters\)](#)

A private spacecraft will attempt the first US touchdown on the moon in more than 50 years. On Wednesday the spacecraft reached lunar orbit setting after firing its main rocket thruster for nearly seven minutes. Odysseus was launched on February 15 atop a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket. With its successful landing yesterday, it is the first commercially manufactured and operated vehicle and the first under NASA’s Artemis lunar program. Private companies have attempted to touchdown on the moon in the past, but have run into issues resulting in an unsuccessful landing. Odysseus is carrying “six NASA payloads of instruments” to gather information ahead of NASA’s crewed Artemis mission later this decade.

[The Pentagon wants industry to transform again to meet demand. Can it?](#)

[Iran sends Russia hundreds of ballistic missiles \(Reuters\)](#)

Continuing the fears of a world engulfed in conflict it has been reported that Iran has provided Russia around 400 surface-to-surface ballistic missiles. They included some short

range weapons, as well road-mobile missiles that are capable of striking targets between 186 and 435 miles. The UN Security Council restrictions on Iranian missile, drone, and other technology exports expired in October. The United States and European Union retained sanctions on Iran's missile program amid "concerns over exports of weapons to its proxies in the Middle East and to Russia." The White House voiced concerns in January about the possibility of Iran supplying weapons to Russia, but at the time there was only evidence of talks and no proof of deliveries. Ukraine's top prosecutor spoke down on the missiles Russia received from North Korea last month saying they had "proven unreliable on the battlefield, with only two of 24 hitting their targets." The missiles sent by Iran are precision weapons and will most likely cause more damage when put to use.

Budget & Economy

[Another year, another disaster aid gap as funding deadline nears \(Roll Call\)](#)

As budget deadlines loom, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) disaster relief fund is facing a summer shortfall in the middle of hurricane and wildfire season. The White House requested an additional \$9 billion back in October, but it remains unclear whether the FY24 Homeland Security bill will offer a way for more disaster aid money. FEMA's most recent monthly report shows the disaster aid account is "sinking into deficit starting in August, after burning through tens of billions of dollars on projects stretching back to Hurricane Maria in 2017." Unless the fund is replenished the disaster relief fund will be \$2.7 billion in the red and by the end of September will be near \$6.8 billion.

[Pharmacies nationwide face delays as health-care tech company reports cyberattack](#)

[Lawmakers press to avoid funding pitfall for public defenders \(Roll Call\)](#)

Appropriators from both sides of the aisle say they are hard at work to address a "budget pitfall for federal public defenders" as funding uncertainty has led to a nationwide hiring freeze. However, as it currently stands both the House and Senate versions of the 2024 Financial Services and General Government spending bill, which covers defender services would "effectively cut its funding." If appropriators add \$108 million to the House proposal and \$136 million to the Senate version they would "at a bare minimum support the right to an attorney in federal court" lawmakers argue. Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) leads the Senate's Financial Services Appropriations subcommittee and Rep. Steve Womack (R, AR-03) who is his House counterpart, are making funding public defenders a 'priority.' While both say it's too early to speculate on final figures they are optimistic in their efforts.

Advanced Technologies

[Human implanted with Neuralink brain chip 'can control computer mouse just by thinking'. Elon Musk says \(Sky News\)](#)

In one of our January Executive Insight Briefs we shared a story of an individual who was going to be implanted with a Neuralink brain chip. There has now been an update from that procedure. Elon Musk has said the "patient seems to have made a full recovery, with no ill

effects we are aware of.” He followed up saying the patient is able to move a mouse around a computer screen just by thinking. The aim of the Neuralink chip is to eventually allow users with disabilities like Stephen Hawking to “communicate faster than an auctioneer.” Musk says the chip would be able to potentially treat obesity, autism, depression, and schizophrenia. The process of chip implantation is via a robot who surgically places a brain-computer interface chip in a region of the brain that controls the intention to move. While no immediate side effects have been reported, folks must wait to see how the long term existence of the chip impacts functions, both good and bad.

[Marines test robotic mule that could carry weapons, sensors](#)

[US Army to test missile defense command system with THAAD weapon \(DefenseNews\)](#)

Later this month the US Army plans to test if its key command-and-control system can operate its Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System. The Army originally developed the Integrated Battle Command System as the “brains” of a future air and missile defense system, intending to link it with a new 360-degree radar and potentially new launchers in order to replace the aging Patriot air-defense system. The Army has been focusing their efforts to connect a web of sensors and shooters on the battlefield and “spent more than a decade developing IBCS to work with radars like the Sentinel A4, Patriot, Lower Tier Air and Missile Defense Sensor and the Indirect Fires Protection Capability-which is still under development.” IBCS experienced many delays after an initial test in 2016. Only did the Army declare it fully operational in the Spring of 2023. It will hold a full test and evaluation for IBCS in the fourth quarter of 2023 and if given the green light will be a big step in the modernization of Army’s air and missile defenses.

Military Installations & Communities

[Marines field new technology that can measure bullet trajectory, simulated wounds in California exercise \(Military.com\)](#)

The US Marine Corps in their largest annual war game outfitted thousands of Marines with new technology designed to measure their deadliness. The new equipment called the Marine Corps Tactical Instrumentation System (MCTIS), “can measure bullet trajectory down to the inch, simulated wounds in different places on the body, and real-time individual Marine locations.” MCTIS is a welcome replacement from the older generations of “laser tag” training systems which were time consuming and inaccurate. Through a watch-like device the technology will tell a Marine where they have been wounded and some sensors are attached to vehicles and can simulate being hit with an anti-vehicle weapon, to include detecting who was wounded and what position they were hit. This new asset will help our Marines become more aware and further in their warfighting capabilities.

[Troops at 5 bases to be part of ‘test moves’ under new private management of household goods shipments](#)

[Air Force confirms parts failure occurred in deadly Japan Osprey crash that left 8 Airmen](#)

[dead \(Military.com\)](#)

Investigators have determined a parts failure occurred during the Osprey crash in November 2023 which resulted in the deaths of all eight Airmen on board. Air Force Special Operations Command said the two investigations into the crash, one carried out by a Safety Investigation Board and the other by an Accident Investigation Board are still ongoing. While it was deemed a parts failure, the root cause of the crash is still unknown. There have been reports investigators are looking into the aircraft's propeller rotor gear box as a possible cause. The information given by the Air Force solidifies an initial assessment that a mechanical failure may have been to blame.

Homeland Security

[DHS sets 'aggressive' recruiting strategy to fill AI jobs \(Federal News Network\)](#)

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is diving into the artificial intelligence world. DHS announced plans to recruit 50 AI experts in 2024. They will join a group that is modeling itself after the US Digital Service, a White House organization that provides technology experts and consultation services to federal agencies. New hires will be paid at the GS-15 salary which ranges from \$123,000 to \$191,900. While individuals could make more in this field doing work in the private sector, DHS' Chief Information Officer believes the mission of the department will compel many to apply. The experts will be working on missions related to countering fentanyl networks, combating child sexual exploitation and abuse, and delivering immigration services. These experts will be "farmed out across the department" and will help the department across critical areas.

[Missouri National Guard, Highway Patrol set to help at border with Texas' Operation Lone Star](#)

[Supervisors less likely to be discriminated at Homeland Security: report \(Federal Times\)](#)

According to a new report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), an independent watchdog agency, it was found that supervisors at the Department of Homeland Security are less likely to be disciplined than other employees in instances of alleged misconduct. At the third-largest federal agency supervisors received disciplinary action less frequently than non-supervisors even though the number of allegations of misconduct involving a supervisor was higher than the proportion of supervisors working in each surveyed office. These offices include the Secret Service, Customs and Border Protection, Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This report is likely to spur responses from Congress and on the campaign trail as Republicans have "called out several agencies for easing up on discipline, bloating the bureaucracy, and politicizing government services."

Transportation & Infrastructure

[Boeing replaces head of troubled 737 Max program \(CNBC\)](#)

In the first big shakeup since a Max 9 panel blew out in the middle of an Alaska Airlines

flight, Boeing is replacing the head of their 737 Max program. It comes in the midst of leadership changes at Boeing to try and stem the fallout since the unfortunate incident two months ago. Katie Ringgold will become president and general manager of the 737 program, Elizabeth Lund will serve as senior vice president of quality for the commercial airline unit; a brand new role. Airlines such as Alaska and United have expressed deep frustration with Boeing as they await for new planes to take advantage of a post-covid boom in travel. The Federal Aviation Administration has increased their direct inspections of Boeing's Max production lines and will not allow the manufacturer to increase output until they are satisfied with quality controls. As Boeing fights with quality issues aboard their aircraft, their chief rival Airbus has ramped up production and deliveries of new planes eclipsing previous expectations.

[Ford, UAW reach local labor deal to avert strike at Kentucky plant](#)

[Harris announces \\$5.8 billion for water infrastructure projects, says clean water is a right \(AP\)](#)

As the Biden-Harris administration continues awarding projects from the bipartisan infrastructure law from 2021, water infrastructure is about to get a big upgrade. The infrastructure law included \$50 billion to make necessary changes to America's water infrastructure in one of the largest, if not the largest, investment in clean water in US history. The announcement included \$3.2 billion for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund that can be used to upgrade water treatment plants, water distribution and piping systems, and lead pipe replacement. With many areas across the country utilizing lead pipes that have been around for decades the investment is welcome news to many. The announcement also included \$1 billion for seven major rural water projects and \$1 billion in support for Great Lakes drinking water projects. Speaking in Pennsylvania, a key state in the 2024 election, Vice President Harris said \$200 million of the new funding will go to the Keystone State.

Biotechnology & Healthcare

[Maternal mental health conditions drive climbing death rate in US, research says \(CNN\)](#)

According to a new evidence review, maternal mental illness is the leading cause of pregnancy-related deaths in the US even though national initiatives developed to combat the issue do not prioritize mental health. The maternal mortality rate in the US is two to threefold greater than in other higher income countries. The review published in the journal JAMA Psychiatry also states the maternal mortality rate has only increased in recent years. What may be more troubling is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention saying "more than 80% of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable." Researchers determined that mental health disorders such as suicide and opioid overdose are responsible for nearly "1 in 4 maternal deaths" in the US. That number is almost double the rate of maternal death from postpartum hemorrhage, which is the second leading cause of death. More screening is needed to try and catch depression during and after pregnancy early so it can be treated and monitored.

[US-China Rivalry Expands to Biotech; Lawmakers Raise Alarm](#)

[FDA warns against smartwatches and rings that claim to measure blood sugar without needles \(US News\)](#)

Advancements in technologies have brought us innovations in the health space like Fitbits and smartwatches. We have now entered into a territory where some technologies are really stretching what they are capable of. Recently smartwatches and new smart rings are claiming they can accurately measure blood sugar levels for medical purposes without piercing the skin. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has warned against these claims and is a blanket statement toward “any watch or ring that claims to measure blood glucose levels in a non-invasive way.” The FDA has not approved such a device. It is important to note, the agency’s notice does not apply to smartwatch apps linked to sensors, such as continuous glucose monitoring systems that measure blood sugar directly. Inaccurate readings from these devices could cause diabetic patients to take the “wrong doses of medication, leading to dangerous levels of blood sugar and possibly mental confusion, coma or even death.”

Climate & Development

[Headed to Hawaii on vacation? Tourists may need to pay a climate tax. \(USA Today\)](#)

Lahaina on the island of Maui was devastated by fires about six months ago killing 100 people. The estimated rebuild from damage sustained is \$6 billion. Hawaiian lawmakers are now calling for action to address the damaging environmental impact of tourism on their lands. A bill proposed in the state legislature would impose a \$25 climate tax on tourists. This comes as a \$50 green fee for visitors to access state parks did not pass in the legislature last year. This new fee would not raise taxes for Hawaii residents and aims “to make visitors more responsible for protecting natural resources.” Gov. Josh Green estimates revenue from the tax is upwards of \$68 million which would go to “wildfire and flood prevention, coral reef restoration, green infrastructure, land management and emergency supplies.” If this bill passes it would be the first of its kind in the United States, while several countries already charge visitors for tourism related infrastructure.

[Dallas Arboretum 'Dallas Blooms' festival moved up, a colorful consequence of climate change](#)

[Chicago launches climate lawsuit against oil industry \(Chicago Sun Times\)](#)

The city of Chicago is joining the ranks of local governments looking to hold fossil fuel producers financially accountable for the effects of climate change. A lawsuit filed in Cook County Circuit Court accuses six oil companies and their trade association the American Petroleum Institute “of waging a campaign to discredit climate science and mislead the public about the dangers of burning fossil fuels.” Chicago is attempting to recoup potentially billions of dollars in damages blamed on the burning of fossil fuels that have led to climate change. Chicago is currently spending \$188 million on climate projects in low-income communities. The Chief Sustainability Officer for Chicago has argued the fossil fuel industry should be able to “pay for the damage they have caused and accountability must be seen.” Industry officials say the lawsuits filed lack merit and are a waste of taxpayer resources. Regardless of the outcome it is for certain lawsuits like these will take commitment for years to come.

Next Week's Hearings

Armed Service Committee:

House: None listed

Senate: None listed

Appropriations Committee:

House: None listed

Senate: None listed

Homeland Security Committee:

House: 2/29, 10 AM: Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security

Senate: 2/27, 10 AM: The US Technology Fueling Russia's War in Ukraine: How and Why



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