

*CBS Mornings*

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[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Dems Look to Win GOP District in Tennessee]

GAYLE KING: Voters in Tennessee have an opportunity to send the Trump administration a very strong message today. That's because there is a special election to fill a congressional seat in the Nashville area. The President won the district a year ago by a wide margin but this race is very close after last month's elections. Nicole Valadez is with us from Nashville. Nicole, a lot of people are watching this one. Good morning to you.

NICOLE VALDES: Gayle, good morning. Republicans are making moves here in Tennessee knowing that the result of this race could send a message not just to Washington, but President Trump as Democrats try to flip a historically red seat.

MATT VAN EPPS: This is absolutely critical.

VALDES: In a deep red district of the Volunteer State, there is an unlikely battle brewing over a special election in December. Two candidates vying to become the next member of Congress. Democratic State Representative Aftyn Behn is looking to keep the momentum going and give Democrats another win following the recent blue victories in November in states like New Jersey and Virginia —

STATE REPRESENTATIVE AFTYN BEHN (D-TN): We cannot accept more of the same.

VALDES: — while Republicans pull out all of the stops to drum up support for first time GOP candidate Matt Van Epps.

VAN EPPS: It's a critical election. We know that the majority in the House is a narrow margin.

VALDES: Ahead of the Election Day, Speaker of the House Mike Johnson flew to Tennessee hoping to energize Republican voters.

HOUSE SPEAKER MIKE JOHNSON (R-LA): They think they can flip the seat from red to blue. That is not going to happen.

VALDES: And President Trump got on the phone, making one final push for Van Epps as a sign of strength of the Republican Party in a special election.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: I have to say the whole world is watching. This is a big deal because right now we are, like, three votes up on the radical left and this would be a wonderful victory for us.

VALDES: Behn leaned on heavy hitters on the left like former Vice President Al Gore and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. [TO BEHN] Why do you think you have a shot at winning in a district where President Trump won by 22 points?

BEHN: The voters are tired. They're tired. I have routinely said throughout the campaign, I don't care who you voted for, I don't care what political party you belong to, if you are upset with the cost of living and the chaos of Washington, then I'm your candidate.

VALDES: Now the campaign for the winning candidate will not end after tonight. They will have to run for reelection in the 2026 midterms, Tony.

TONY DOKOUPIL: Nicole, thank you very much.