

NBC's *Today*

10/06/26

7:00:16 a.m. [TEASE]

44 seconds

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE: The midterm elections exactly four weeks away.

CRAIG MELVIN: And the balance of power in Washington up for grabs. It is October 6. This is *Today*. Rallying cry.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Rallying Cry]

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: I'm asking you to do me one favor: Pretend I'm on the ballot, please.

MELVIN: President Trump hitting his fourth state in five days, part of his barnstorming tour in the final push to November. Control of Congress on the line and the newest poll numbers favoring Democrats. This morning, we'll break it all down: the key races to watch from coast to coast, the major issues on the minds of voters, and what the White House is now saying about those controversial TV ads flooding the airwaves and paid for by taxpayers.

(...)

7:03:11 a.m.

7 minutes and 57 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Midterm Countdown]

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Happening *Today*; On the Trail]

MELVIN: But we are going to start with a countdown to the midterms, now just four weeks away from today, President Trump hitting the trail in Nebraska last night for what has become a tight Senate race in a longtime Republican stronghold, one of several close race Democrats are hoping to flip.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Happening *Today*; Majority at Stake]

GUTHRIE: Big picture, here's what we're looking at. Republicans currently hold the majority in both chambers of Congress, and Democrats need to net about three seats to take control of the House and net four to win the Senate.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Happening *Today*; Controversial Ad]

MELVIN: Meanwhile, facing backlash from both sides of the aisle, President Trump announcing a major change for some controversial campaign ads that have been paid for with taxpayer

money. We've got it all covered this morning. We'll start with NBC's Gabe Gutierrez. He is at his post there at the White House. Gabe, good morning.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Trump Hits Trail with One Month Until Midterms]

GABE GUTIERREZ: Craig, good morning. President Trump is kicking his midterm blitz into overdrive, doubling down on his message to Republican voters to pretend that he's on the ballot and increasingly taking steps to ease voters' concerns about the economy, with control of Congress on the line. With four weeks to go until the crucial midterm elections, President Trump in an all-out push to rally Republicans —

TRUMP: This is the most important midterm election.

GUTIERREZ: — even in deep red states like Nebraska.

TRUMP: I'm asking you to do me one favor: Pretend I'm on the ballot, please.

GUTIERREZ: The GOP incumbent there, Pete Ricketts, is in a tighter-than-expected Senate race against independent Dan Osborn, facing increasing voter frustration with the economy and rising oil and gas prices from the Iran war.

TRUMP: Today I'm announcing another unprecedented step to bring down costs.

GUTIERREZ: The President signing an executive order on stage, directing states to lift some restrictions on a type of diesel used in farming. It's one of a number of promises the President has made on the campaign trail, recently pledging \$5,000 for every adult if Republicans would win, a move that would cost more than \$1 trillion. Yesterday, the President also drawing backlash with these comments defending the war.

TRUMP: It's a small price to pay for keeping the world safe, keeping our country safe. They could take out a city, let 'em take — let it — let 'em out Los Angeles, let 'em take out San Diego.

GUTIERREZ: Overnight, LA's mayor calling the comments “irresponsible threats” while California's governor describes them as “deranged and dangerous.” In a sign of how important the midterms are for Republicans with control of Congress up for grabs, political ads have been blanketing the airwaves, including taxpayer-funded ads promoting Trump, which lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have criticized. Now, the President in a rare reversal, writing on social media, “I have decided to do the patriotic ads, among others, and pay for them myself, and with money I raised for MAGA Inc.,” a super PAC. A political ad tracking firm estimates the government has spent at least \$10 million to air the ads so far. A senior White House official says the President's post will only apply to future ads. There is no indication there will be any kind of reimbursement for the ones that have already aired. Savannah?

GUTHRIE: All right, Gabe, thank you very much. That brings us to our chief data analyst, Steve

Kornacki at his big board. Steve, morning to you. Let's talk about the United States Senate. First, they need to net four — Democrats — to reconrol the Senate. You know, it looked like an uphill battle, but suddenly some of these red states are in play.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Countdown to Midterm Elections]

STEVE KORNACKI: Yeah, A question for Democrats, is there a mirage in any of those? They need net gain of four seats. They feel good about flipping North Carolina. Maine, where Susan Collins is — is the only Republican-held seat in the state that Trump lost. Now, she's won before against the odds, but if Democrats were to get those two, they still would need two more. Ohio, Iowa, Texas, Alaska, maybe Kansas are their targets. Those states have one thing in common. Trump won them all by double digits, more than ten points. They would need at least two of those, and Republicans think they could take Minnesota, Michigan, New Hampshire, three Democratic-held seats. They think they could pick off one or two of those, and complicate that math.

GUTHRIE: Well, we'll see how that goes. And we see the President is campaigning in some of those red states, which indicates they are in play. Let's talk about the House, in that situation, Democrats would need to net just three to retake control of the House.

KORNACKI: You see how narrow that margin is? And, take a look at this, this is the generic ballot, our polling average, you see a ten-point Democratic average. The one thing to keep in mind, though, you think back to Trump's first midterm. It was not a good midterm for him in the House. The math has changed since then. There's a lot more safe Republican seats than there were back then. There's a lot less low-hanging fruit for the Democrats. So, that ten-point lead, while that looks big on paper, when you start to look at what's actually in play district wide, there's less there than there was in Trump's first term.

GUTHRIE: The party in power in the midterms — the party in the White House generally loses seats. Donald Trump can sometimes do magic when he's on the ballot. He's telling his voters, pretend I'm on the ballot, yet he also has some problems with his own numbers.

KORNACKI: Yeah, I mean, take a look at this — we'll just skip to the end here, but you can see this is Trump's approval rating here. 39 percent, under 40 percent in the poll average. So, when he says, make this about me, pretend I'm on the ballot, you can see there's a big risk with an approval rating like that. The one thing I would say, the three times Trump has been on the ballot, '16, '20, '24, he has overperformed the polls. He's gotten energy out there that the polls haven't picked up on, so that might be what he's trying to connect with and tap into.

GUTHRIE: Yeah, the White House hoping that he can defy gravity once again. Steve, thank you very much. Craig, over to you.

MELVIN: Alright, Joining us now with a little bit more perspective on the midterms and everything that's at stake, Kristen Welker, moderator of *Meet the Press*. Kristen, always good to have you. Let's start where Steve and Savannah just left off, the President's sagging poll

numbers. He says he's going to be on the road most of the next 28 days or so. What's the Republican strategy here?

KRISTEN WELKER: Well, Craig, look, Republicans still think President Trump is their best chance to energize the base. You just heard Steve talking about that. It's certainly notable. He's been campaigning in a number of reliably red states, a sign that Republicans are jittery, even in places that are Republican strongholds. One Republican strategist, though, noted that in 2018, candidate who distanced themselves from President Trump failed to rally the GOP base and still struggled with independents and moderate voters. Still, this strategist described the move, Craig, as uncomfortable, given just how soft the energy is in the Republican party right now, and remember, President Trump being on the trail could actually cut both ways, because Democrats also see him as a motivator for their base, Craig.

MELVIN: Well, let's talk about that for a second here, Kristen. Is that essentially the message for Democrats over the next four weeks? We're not him, we're not President Trump?

WELKER: To some extent. Look, Democrats say they're sensing an immense amount of anxiety on the ground over the economy, they're looking to tap into that frustration. Still, I have been talking to a number of Democratic strategists and candidates who say they can't just rely on an anti-Trump message. That's why you're seeing the economy and more local issues like data centers become a real flashpoint. But those same strategists acknowledge voters may be sour on the President, but they're not fully energized about Democrats, either. They're lacking a cohesive message, and the party is having a series of ideological debates, Craig, so can they unify before November? That's one of the key questions we're watching.

MELVIN: Really quickly here before I let you go, how much of a factor is money playing here, Kristen?

WELKER: Oh, it's a big one, Craig. While Democrats have the momentum on their side, Republicans have the money! You can see here, in House and Senate races overall, Republicans have far outspent Democrats, and they're expected to do so through Election Day. And, in talking to both Democrat and Republican strategists, the fact that Republicans will spend even more money in these final weeks will almost guarantee that a number of these battleground races will get even tighter, Craig.

MELVIN: Kristen Welker, moderator of *Meet the Press*. Kristen, thank you.

(...)

8:00:19 a.m. [TEASE]
18 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Countdown On]

MELVIN: Coming up, countdown on. President Trump on the trail with just four weeks until the

crucial midterm elections.

TRUMP: This is the most important midterm election.

MELVIN: This as he announces a major change to those controversial taxpayer-funded campaign ads. We're live with the latest.

(...)

8:02:40 a.m.

2 minutes and 34 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: News at 8; Trump Hits Trail With One Month Until Midterms]

MELVIN: We began — we begin with the midterms, now just four weeks away. President Trump on the campaign trail with the balance of power in Washington up for grabs. NBC's Gabe Gutierrez is at the White House with the very latest. Gabe, good morning.

GUTIERREZ: Craig, good morning. President Trump says he'll be on the road nearly every night until election day, control of Congress on the line. He's increasingly taking steps to ease voters' concerns about the economy. But overnight, also drawing fierce backlash over his comments about cities in California. With four weeks to go until the crucial midterm elections, President Trump in an all-out push to rally Republicans —

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GUTIERREZ: — even in deep red states like Nebraska.

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MELVIN: Alright, Gabe Gutierrez at the White House. Gabe, thank you.