

NBC's *Today*

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7:00:54 a.m. [TEASE]

16 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Crunch Time]

CRAIG MELVIN: Crunch time. The crucial midterm elections exactly three weeks from today. President Trump back on the campaign trail overnight, making the case for his party.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: We're going to elect strong Republican majorities in the House and the Senate.

MELVIN: Democrats making a major push to flip seats in traditionally Republican states. This morning, everything you need to know about the races, with the control of Congress hanging in the balance.

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7:33:55 a.m. [TEASE]

9 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Happening *Today*; Midterm Countdown]

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE: Also, today marks three weeks until the midterm elections. We've got a full breakdown of the key races to watch. Some brand-new polling just in this morning.

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7:07:54 a.m.

6 minutes and 53 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Trump on Trail With Three Weeks Until Midterms]

GUTHRIE: Today marks three weeks until the critical midterm elections that will determine control of Congress. President Trump continuing his campaign tour to drum up support for Republicans. Democrats looking to expand the map, and we'll break it all down with Steve Kornacki in just a moment. First, though, NBC's Ryan Nobles joins us with the very latest on all of it. Hi, Ryan, good morning.

RYAN NOBLES: Hey, Savannah, good morning. Early voting starts today in Georgia, which is one of the most important states on the map, while Iowa, Kansas, and North Carolina all kick off their early voting this week, meaning Election Day for much of the country in this hotly contested election is, in many ways, already here. With three weeks to go until Election Day, Democrats are expanding their midterm map, making new investments in reliably red states like

Ohio, which President Trump won three times.

TRUMP: Thank you, Ohio!

NOBLES: The President in Youngstown Monday to support incumbent senator, John Husted.

TRUMP: We won this thing by so much in Youngstown.

NOBLES: The event interrupted by protesters. [CROWD BOOS] The crowd and law enforcement responding as Trump looked on.

TRUMP: Go on a diet, fast.

NOBLES: In the speech, Trump attacking immigrants in Ohio —

TRUMP: If you want to stop Ohio from being plundered, ransacked and destroyed — [SCREEN WIPE] — we're going to stop it.

NOBLES: — and tried to boost Husted, who's facing a fierce challenge from former Senator Sherrod Brown.

TRUMP: Do not let Sherrod Brown slither his way back into power.

NOBLES: The President heaping personal praise on Husted, a former college football player.

TRUMP: I don't do this with men very often. I started examining his body, because I didn't know he was a great athlete.

NOBLES: Ohio isn't the only red state at risk for Republicans. Mr. Trump also plans to travel to Kansas, which has not elected a Democrat to the Senate in 90 years, to help incumbent senator Roger Marshall, who's locked in a tight race. Some GOP voters there feeling Trump fatigue.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE KANSAS VOTER: Certainly it's not all his fault, but he — as a leader, the buck stops with him.

NOBLES: His Democratic challenger, megachurch pastor Adam Hamilton taking aim at Trump's policies, specifically his plan to rein in skyrocketing energy prices by lifting sanctions on Russian diesel fuel.

ADAM HAMILTON: Need to get out of that war.

NOBLES: The President has repeatedly promised a big drop in prices when the conflict ends. And the world's richest man, trillionaire Elon Musk, is now the known biggest donor, doling out \$276 million to the GOP since July, according to campaign finance data first reported by *The New York Times*. And it probably doesn't come as a surprise that campaign spending is off the

charts. In Ohio alone, more than \$200 million have been spent in this election cycle, Craig.

MELVIN: Geez. A fifth of \$1 billion. Let's go from Ohio to Texas here for a moments because the Democrat running for the Senate here, looking to make history, flip that seat. He was absent from the campaign trail for about nine days, if my math is right. Do we know why?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Talarico False Rumor Controversy]

NOBLES: Yeah, this has raised a lot of speculation online, Craig. I was actually in Texas on the day that James Talarico announced that he was sick. He was supposed to appear at an event in person. He was off the campaign for almost nine days. He said he was suffering from the flu, but the prolonged absence provoked wild speculation about his whereabouts. His opponent, Ken Paxton, even launched a tip line. It reached a fever pitch this weekend when a false claim exploded online and was amplified by some conservatives, including Elon Musk, that he'd actually been at a mental health facility in Ohio, but on Sunday night, that facility actually came out to say that he'd not been treated there. Talarico has since said he didn't want to get anyone else sick, and he returned to the campaign trail on Friday. He said it was the craziest thing that he's ever heard — the theory that he was in a mental health facility, and, Craig, he even added that he's never even been to Ohio.

MELVIN: Okay. Alright, Ryan Nobles, good to have you here in person. Savannah, over to you.

GUTHRIE: Alright, NBC's Steve Kornacki joins us now at the big board. If the President were not on the ballot, but he says, pretend I am. And, if he were, this is the job approval rating.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Midterm Countdown: By the Numbers]

STEVE KORNACKI: Yeah, big picture here, these are headwinds for Republicans. An approval rating now under 40 percent on average for the President, 38 percent. Notably, his first midterm, 2018, tough one, his approval was actually a few points higher than that and [in] the generic ballot. Democrats continuing to have a sizable lead there.

GUTHRIE: Let's talk about the Senate in particular, the Democrats would need to net four seats to regain control of the Senate. What are some of their top targets?

KORNACKI: Yeah, I mean, interestingly, if Democrats are going to get that net gain of four, invariably, they're going to have to win a state like this, Texas. And what I mean here is a state that Trump didn't just win; he won this by double digits. What Democrats are banking on has changed in Texas; they think in Ken Paxton, they've drawn a dream opponent, a lot of negatives around Paxton. And what Democrats are counting on is a one-two punch — the suburbs around Dallas and Houston to swing hard to them, and then, along the border in South Texas, this is the part of the state where Trump made massive gains with Hispanic voters in 2024. Democrats are counting on those gains being reversed to put Texas into play. Other places Democrats are looking: Maine, Susan Collins — this has been the white whale for Democrats. They've been chasing her for 30 years and can't get her.

GUTHRIE: Right. The Democrats always win the presidential and Susan Collins defies in gravity.

KORNACKI: Exactly. And that — in 2020, now what Democrats will tell you is, in 2020, it was Collins on the ballot and Trump. And so, voters could vote against Trump, which they did, and vote for Collins, which they did. Would those anti-Trump voters still vote for her now, knowing the Senate is on the line? That's the key to that race.

GUTHRIE: Let's look at a couple of Republican targets, Michigan topping your list.

KORNACKI: Yeah, take a look at this one here. Republicans are hoping they can turn the table, if Democrats pick up a few seats. If Republicans could get Michigan, that could be a big step to helping Republicans keep control of the Senate here. And the test here is Abdul el-Sayed. We've seen candidates as far to the left as him win primaries around the country this year, usually in places where Democrats have no trouble winning in November — in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New York. This is a state that Donald Trump carried twice. Check out particularly when the returns come in on election night, the suburbs north of Detroit, right here, Oakland County here. Are those voters there, typically Democratic voting — are they comfortable with el-Sayed, or does he underperform there?

GUTHRIE: And Mike Rogers lost in the last Senate race by 0.3 percent, so this is going to be a very tight race to watch. You have one more that the Republicans are looking at?

KORNACKI: Yeah, and this is sort of the wild card here. We'll see if Republicans actually put some money here, because the polling has been close in Minnesota here.

GUTHRIE: Minnesota!

KORNACKI: Yeah.

GUTHRIE: A Democratic stronghold, typically.

KORNACKI: Absolutely. 1972, the last time this state voted for Republican for President. There's a big public benefit, welfare fraud scandal that's playing out in Minnesota. Peggy Flanagan is the lieutenant governor under Tim Walz. He didn't run for re-election because of that scandal largely here, so she's got some baggage here, and the polling has been tight. This one is worth watching.

GUTHRIE: Alright, Steve, gonna be an interesting night, three weeks from tonight.