

NBC's *Today*

10/19/26

7:00:09 a.m. [TEASE]

48 seconds

SHEINELLE JONES: Just two weeks to go in the race to the midterms.

SAVANNAH GUTGHRIE: With tight races in some surprising places. It is October 19. This is *Today*. The final stretch. President Trump launching a new campaign trail blitz —

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: The Final Stretch]

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: We have more people working than ever before —

GUTHRIE: — as the latest NBC News poll shows 71 percent of Americans believe the country is on the wrong track. What that could mean for the Republicans' control of Congress when America decides in just over two weeks, and the deep red states that are suddenly competitive.

STEPHANIE GOSK [TO ORTIZ]: How do you feel about this election?

ANDY ORTIZ: Very disappointed, frustrated, let down, bamboozled.

GUTHRIE: All the new numbers with Steve Kornacki at the big board.

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7:03:01 a.m.

5 minutes and 4 seconds

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

GUTHRIE: But we will begin this busy Monday with the countdown to the midterms. It is on, just 15 days away. The President ramping up for a campaign blitz this week. He's heading to Kansas and North Carolina amid tight races in those states.

JONES: It comes as a new NBC News poll shows more Americans believe the U.S. is on the wrong track, and the President's approval numbers hit a new low for his second term.

GUTHRIE: We've got a lot to cover this morning. We'll get started with NBC's Gabe Gutierrez. He's at the White House this morning. Gabe, good morning.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Trump's Midterm Blitz Amid New Poll Numbers]

GABE GUTIERREZ: Savannah, good morning. With the clock ticking, the President plans to crisscross the country again this week. New poll numbers show Republicans facing an uphill

battle to keep control of Congress. This morning, with the midterms two weeks away, President Trump is playing defense and heading to typically red states where Democrats are showing signs of progress. First up, Kansas, where he'll campaign for the Republican incumbent in that key Senate race. Later this week, he plans to visit the Carolinas, Iowa, and Florida.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: This is the most important midterm in the history of our country.

GUTIERREZ: The President on the move as a new NBC News poll shows, 71 percent of Americans believe the U.S. is on the wrong track. That's the highest level of his second term. The President's approval rating also dropping to 34 percent, with voters especially sour on the economy and soaring gas prices. Corruption is also a major concern. And while Americans are skeptical of both parties, more than half say they find the Trump administration more corrupt than previous ones.

TRUMP: We have more people working than ever before.

GUTIERREZ: As the President faces pressure to bring down gas prices, he's defending his decision to exempt Russia from sweeping new sanctions and making a deal to release Russian diesel into the global market.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER [TO TRUMP] President, why did you waive the sanctions?

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: It's going — it's going very well

GUTIERREZ: On social media, the President arguing he does not want to “drive..Russia away from” peace talks and attacking Ukraine's President Zelenskyy, saying “he doesn't want to end this war.”

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY [on NBC's *Meet the Press*, 10/18/26]: If the United States will support Putin. I mean, it's unbelievable. It's a tragedy. It's historic mistake.

GUTIERREZ: The move also drawing bipartisan pushback, including from Republicans in tight battleground races.

FORMER CONGRESSMAN MIKE ROGERS (R-MI) [on CNN's *State of the Union*, 10/18/26]: I'm just a little skeptical that this will work in the way that the administration wants it to work.

CONGRESSWOMAN ASHLEY HINSON (R-IA) [on 10/14/26]: We need to lower gas prices in this country. We need to lower diesel prices. But I don't think we need to be making a deal with Russia to do it.

GUTIERREZ: President Trump insists his outreach to Russia will help bring down fuel prices ahead of the midterms, even if some within his own party are increasingly skeptical, Savannah.

GUTHRIE: All right, Gabe, thank you. We've got NBC's Steve Kornacki right here at his big board, taking a closer look at where things stand with the Senate, just 15 days to go, Steve. Here is the map. And Democrats, if they want to get control of the Senate, have to net four new seats.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: NBC News Poll Released as Midterms Loom]

STEVE KORNACKI: Yeah, the key word there — net. They need to pick up at least four of the red seats, the Republican-held seats that they're targeting here. Some of these seats, by the way, in very pro-Trump states over the last decade, but I say at least four because there are also a couple of Democratic held seats here. Republicans think they can flip. And, if Republicans flip those, it really complicates the math for Democrats.

GUTHRIE: Let's start with those red states that Democrats are trying to pick up and look at some of these poll numbers, which look surprisingly tight.

KORNACKI: I mean, you see the numbers with Trump's approval rating declining, and you hear the chatter of Democrats saying blue wave Republicans fearing that this is why this is what the polls are showing. These are the races that Democrats are targeting. Republican-held seats in the polls, to some degree here, have the Democrats ahead in all of them. Now, one of them here in North Carolina, you see kind of an outlier. That's a big lead there for the Democrat. Even Republicans, when you look at how they're spending their resources, they seem to be moving away from North Carolina. But it is close everywhere else. You know, look, 1.2, 1.1, 0.5, so they're leads for Democrats, but they are tenuous as well.

GUTHRIE: I mean, these are states that Trump won by double digits two years ago. And, if there's anything about the Trump era that we know, it's that polling often undercounts these Republican Trump voters.

KORNACKI: That's right. I mean, look, Republicans in the Trump era have gotten used to seeing polls like this in states like this and saying, got them just where we want them because we've seen it in places — Ohio, Iowa come to mind. Even if you can go back, there was a Senate race in Kansas in 2020. Polls looked really promising for the Democrats. Republican ended up winning by double digits. So, that Trump vote has been missed before. Doesn't always show up. A lot of theories why. But if that happens again, these numbers can change in a hurry.

GUTHRIE: What also is interesting is you talked about the blue states. Let's go back to — these are Democratic seats that the Democrats must hold on to. And they're showing pretty tight races as well.

KORNACKI: I mean, check this out. Michigan. Abdul el-Sayed, the Democratic nominee, he leads in the polls basically by about three points. Very close right there. And the thing to keep in mind: el-Sayed, when he won the Democratic primary this summer, polls had him up by about ten points or so. He ended up winning by a fraction of a point. The polls overstated his support in the primary. If that happens again here, that three could disappear.

GUTHRIE: And keep an eye on blue Minnesota.

KORNACKI: Minnesota of all places.

GUTHRIE: We're going to have an interesting election night no matter what happens. Steve, you'll be there. Thank you so much.

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8:00:11 a.m. [TEASE]
14 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Full Speed Ahead]

GUTHRIE: Coming up, full speed ahead. President Trump ramping up his campaign blitz.

TRUMP: This is the most important midterm in the history of our country.

GUTHRIE: What a new NBC News poll is revealing this morning, with the midterms just 15 days away.

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8:02:34 a.m.
3 minutes and 23 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: News at 8; Trump's Midterm Blitz Amid New Poll Numbers]

GUTHRIE: We'll begin with those critical midterm elections just over two weeks away now. And today, the President is campaigning in Kansas for the incumbent Republican Senator who's in a surprisingly tight race against his Democrat challenger in a state Trump won by double digits. NBC's Stephanie Gosk traveled to Kansas ahead of the President's visit to hear what is on voters' minds. Hi, Steph, morning.

STEPHANIE GOSK: Hey. Good morning, Savannah. Republicans have been pouring in money in recent weeks to shore up what is usually a solid red seat. Democrat megachurch pastor Adam Hamilton is trying to defeat incumbent Roger Marshall in a race that the polls show right now is a dead heat. President Trump won Kansas by more than 16 points in 2024, but in these midterms, the Sunflower State has become an unlikely battleground. This morning, President Trump adding a campaign stop in Kansas as his party tries to keep control of Congress, calling these midterm elections the most important in U.S. history.

TRUMP: We got to get out and vote. And if we do, we're going to win in a landslide.

GOSK: A new NBC News poll finds 71 percent of adults think the country is on the wrong track.

In the Republican stronghold of Kansas, there's a sense that the political winds may be changing. We met up with voters for Friday Night Football at Newton High School, north of Wichita. [TO ORTIZ] Did you vote for Donald Trump?

ORTIZ: I did.

GOSK [TO ORTIZ]: And how do you feel about this election?

ORTIZ: Very disappointed, frustrated, let down, bamboozled.

GOSK: Kansas has not sent a Democrat to the Senate in nearly a century. But in recent weeks, the race has gotten very close.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE VOTER: I talked to different people. [SCREEN WIPE] There are Republicans, but they don't like what's going on.

GOSK: Democrat Adam Hamilton, a moderate and a pastor in a popular church, is taking on incumbent Senator Roger Marshall, a Republican who had himself closely to the President's policies. What the President will find here across party lines is an economy under strain for everyday Americans.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOTER: I got to get a tank of gas every week, so I see it every week.

GOSK: Diesel prices in Kansas have increased nearly 80 percent compared to a year ago, largely because of the war with Iran. 85 percent of the land in Kansas is used for agriculture, and the farmers are already living on razor-thin margins. So, when diesel prices go up, it hurts. And they are feeling real pain here in the country's breadbasket. Mark Wallace is a fifth-generation farmer, and like most farms, diesel is critical.

MARK WALLACE: And we are in the time of the year we're consuming the most fuel we can possibly consume. So does it hit? Absolutely.

GOSK: But for Wallace, that economic pain will not turn into a vote for the Democrats. So, will the President's visit today help? Former Trump voter Andy Ortiz doesn't want to hear it.

ORTIZ: And no, I will not be going to that convention or rally or whatever you call it. And I don't think I would have said that 18 months ago. I might have been trying to be in the front row.

GOSK: So over and over, voters told me just how important the cost of living is to them. One woman I spoke to said she had to get a second job to make ends meet. Another couple told me how they have two incomes and are still living paycheck-to-paycheck. The cost of living, guys, is going to be first and foremost on voters minds in this election, for sure, and certainly in Kansas.

GUTHRIE: And things like gas prices and diesel prices. Economic indicator that everybody feels.

GOSK: Yep.

GUTHRIE: Yeah. Stephanie. Thank you.

GOSK: You're welcome.