

NBC's *Today*

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9 minutes and 10 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Midterm Countdown; One Week]

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE: One week and counting. The midterm elections are next Tuesday. And as the day approaches, let's just remind everybody what's at stake.

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

CRAIG MELVIN: So, Republicans currently hold the majority in both houses. In order to take control, Democrats would need to net four seats in the Senate and then three in the House.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Happening *Today*; Key Senate Races]

GUTHRIE: Now, here is a look at the key Senate races that NBC News is tracking. You see them in yellow, ten in all. Among them, a heated battle in the traditionally reliable Republican stronghold of Texas. And how competitive is it? Well, the President is making two stops there today, marking his third trip to Texas this month alone..

MELVIN: We've got it all covered for you this morning, including a look at the numbers breakdown and full election analysis. We'll start with NBC's Garrett Haake. Garrett, good morning.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Final Push With One Week to Midterms]

GARRETT HAAKE: Craig, good morning. That midterm map of battlegrounds continues to shift in these final days. You could argue it now includes the state of Mississippi, which hasn't elected a Democrat to the Senate since 1982. But Republicans are concerned enough about that prospect this year that President Trump dropped into the Magnolia State overnight, and into the middle of a race where rising costs are on the ballot. With just one week to go until Election Day, President Trump rallying Republicans in Mississippi overnight.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: I'm here because Cindy's doing great, but I've just got to make sure. I can't take a chance.

HAAKE: It's another deep-red state where the GOP is unexpectedly on defense, with a competitive Senate race between Republican incumbent Cindy Hyde-Smith and Democrat Scott Colom, a district attorney.

SENATOR CINDY HYDE-SMITH (R-MS): Is this not the best President in our lifetime?

HAAKE: Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the nation, and with voters worried about

high prices, the President defending his policies.

TRUMP: We haven't raised the costs. We have growth. And, by the way, your incomes are going up much faster.

HAAKE: While costs, including groceries and the price of gas, have risen since the President's war with Iran, Hyde-Smith has been on the defensive over controversial comments she made earlier this year on the price of beef.

HYDE-SMITH: You know, you have so many proteins to choose from.

VOTER [in Colom ad]: I would rather pick another senator.

HAAKE: The senator later saying she was trying to point out cheaper options. Colom emphasizing rising prices yesterday.

COLOM: We're all paying more at the grocery store.

HAAKE: And attending the rally, vowing to listen to Trump voters outside. It's the latest in a series of tightening Senate races nationwide, including Michigan, where Democrat Abdul El-Sayed is locked in a close battle with former Republican congressman Mike Rogers. El-Sayed trying to tie Rogers to President Trump.

ABDUL EL-SAYED: My name and my faith are not the reason you cannot afford your gas.

HAAKE: Rogers accusing El-Sayed of misleading voters about his record.

FORMER CONGRESSMAN MIKE ROGERS (R-MI): Here's this Democratic Socialists of America-aligned candidate who is very extreme.

GARRETT HAAKE: El-Sayed has been campaigning with Democrats, including former President Barack Obama, who drew attention with these comments over the weekend.

FORMER BARACK OBAMA: He's got the White House looking like Saddam Hussein opened a Cheesecake Factory.

HAAKE: Trump responding.

TRUMP: He said, this isn't a Cheesecake Factory. Can you believe it? Which is a very successful company. [SCREEN WIPE] I took over the White House and it was in horrible condition.

HAAKE: Now, we don't know for certain a single winner or loser in these midterms yet, but we already do know they will be historic. The ad-tracking firm AdImpact tells us that more than \$11.2 billion have already been spent on these midterm elections, making this the most expensive election cycle ever, surpassing the Presidential election two years ago. Much of that money is

spent on those ubiquitous television ads, especially in battleground states like Texas, where President Trump returns for two rallies today. Savannah?

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE: Garrett, thank you. NBC's Steve Kornacki is at the ready at his trusty big board, ready to take us inside the numbers. One week to go. First, give us the general state of the race.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Midterm Countdown: Where Things Stand]

STEVE KORNACKI: The big climate here nationally, what it looks like, this is the NBC polling average, continues to look like what it has all fall: clocking in at 61 percent, his average disapproval rating, and the generic ballot, asking folks which party they want to see control Congress, continues to be that high, single-digit lead for Democrats.

GUTHRIE: Of course, the devil is in the details in each particular campaign, and let's — I think a way to look at this. We showed the ten battlegrounds — the Senate battlegrounds. Let's look where the President is traveling. That really tells the story of where these competitive districts are. We'll start with Texas. He's got a couple of stops there today.

KORNACKI: It's really interesting. You can see in those stops as well some of the concerns that the White House and the Republican Party have. Take a look. Trump is going to be in Corpus Christi — that's in Nueces County. Getting down to South Texas now. Trump won this county in 2024 by 12 points over Kamala Harris. Why? It was because of part of that surge he had with Hispanic voters. This is a majority-Hispanic county. Trump had not done this well in his previous campaigns, so this is about the Hispanic vote in South Texas.

GUTHRIE: And Democrats are hoping to get back some of that Latina vote. We'll see what happens there. Let's talk about Ohio. He's got plans to go there. That is another, in recent years, reliably Republican state.

KORNACKI: Yeah, Trump turned it into that. And one of the reasons he did was places like this. This is where he's going to be, Ross County, for his rally. This is the heart of this region here, sort of going through southern Ohio up into the Mahoning Valley, where Trump wins. Trump won here by 40 points. So, what's interesting: Why is he here? Have you heard him out there giving that message, "pretend my name is on the ballot"? They are worried, Republicans, that these voters—they're still Republicans, but are they going to be jazzed? Are they going to turn out? Trump's trying to tell them, if I'm there, you'll turn out.

GUTHRIE: And Sherrod Brown lost two years ago. So, this is his comeback campaign, he hopes. And finally, let's look at Iowa.

KORNACKI: No state in the country has more counties that voted for Barack Obama twice and Donald Trump three times than Iowa. Where you really saw that in Iowa was all sort of along the Mississippi River, right here—familiar, Dubuque, Dubuque County. This is where Trump is going to end up going. You can see Trump won this by nine points in 2024. Just go back in time

right here. He barely won it in '16. In 2012, this was a core Obama county. That whole region of Iowa there: Obama-Trump voters. That's what that stop is about.

GUTHRIE: That's a swingy area of Iowa. We have a lot to cover next Tuesday. Meet you there. Craig over to you.

MELVIN: Alright, SG, for more perspective now, insight on the midterms as well, let's turn to Kristen Welker, moderator of *Meet the Press*. You would be hard-pressed to find a more reliably red state than Texas.

KRISTEN WELKER: Yep.

MELVIN: President Trump there today. What's happening in the Lone Star State?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Midterm Countdown: Key Races to Watch]

WELKER: Craig, it's a great question. A Republican source told me overnight that Republicans are actually more concerned about a state like Texas than they are about some of those states in the Midwest. That's why they're seeing that intense focus on Texas. And there are a couple things that we'll be watching for. Can the Trump coalition stay together? You heard Savannah and Steve talking about Latino voters. They were so critical to his win in 2024. They'll be watching him very closely. Early voting so far, turnout has exceeded where it was in 2022. Clearly, a lot of enthusiasm. A lot of Latino voters have turned out. Redistricting: could it actually backfire in some of these Texas districts? So, we're watching that, and then the spending. You have Elon Musk, who's poured \$190 million into it, Craig, making it one of the most expensive races in history. So, it's just this extraordinary mix. But zooming out, the fact that we are talking about Texas, a reliably red state, it does speak to the quality of the candidate. We know that Ken Paxton does have some political baggage, but it speaks to this broader climate that you just saw Steve lay out with Savannah.

MELVIN: The President is going to be in Texas. He's going to be in Ohio and Iowa as well again. Other states that historically, in the past cycle or two, have been reliably Republican. Do Democrats actually think they can win in these states?

WELKER: It's a great question. They do feel bullish about Texas. They're feeling bullish about some of these Midwest states, like Ohio. Iowa, I think, is going to be tricky. But when it comes to a state like Mississippi, when it comes to states like South Carolina, that's where Democrats acknowledge, look, this is going to be an uphill battle. They feel as though they've chosen strong candidates, but these are states that haven't gone Democratic in decades. So, it's going to be really tough to cross that finish line. I did talk to Senator Raphael Warnock who said to me, look this is about a broader, long-term strategy, also as much as it is about 2026. He believes that Democrats haven't invested in some of these Southern states, and you're starting to really see that effort pick up right now in 2026. Could that be competitive? We'll see.

MELVIN: Alright, Kristen Welker, always great to have you.

WELKER: Great to be here! Looking forward to next week.

MELVIN: Kristen will bring you the very latest on all of the key races next week, and stay with NBC News for complete election night coverage next Tuesday, November 3rd, on NBC, NBC News NOW, and streaming on Peacock.

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8:02:46 a.m.

4 minutes and 15 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: News at 87; Final Push with One Week to Midterms]

CRAIG MELVIN: We're going to begin with the final push to the midterms now, just one week from today. Control of Congress up for grabs. And, of course, one of the biggest issues on voters' minds: the cost of living. Prices are up across the board, including the cost of diesel. And that is causing some major problems in school districts nationwide, some forced to make budget cuts, so they can actually afford to keep the buses running. NBC's Ryan Nobles is here in the studio after a recent trip to rural Washington state. Ryan, good morning.

RYAN NOBLES: Hey Craig, good morning. With just one week to go, rising costs are hitting voters in battlegrounds across America. For instance, the price of diesel fuel has gone up much quicker than many school districts were prepared to handle. In Yakima, Washington, which is about two hours east of Seattle, the increase is equivalent to the cost of two full-time teachers, forcing tough decisions directly impacting kids and voters. With one week to go before the midterm elections, affordability remains the dominant issue on the ballot, from the skyrocketing cost of living, from groceries to housing, and, of course, energy.

WOMAN: I'm very worried. I know the effects of diesel prices. I know how it's affecting my family personally.

NOBLES: It's a reality that's impacting not just families, but school districts from coast to coast. In picturesque Eatonville, in the shadow of Mount Rainier, diesel is among the most expensive in the country. Nationwide, it's \$6.35 per gallon. Washington state is averaging \$7.28. Bonny McNickle, the district's transportation director and bus driver, has been forced to adjust bus routes and stagger pickup times.

BONNY MCNICKLE: I've cringed every time someone grabs their fuel card, and I know they're going to put 100 gallons into a bus, and I know that's, you know, \$700 at least.

NOBLES: In Yakima, Assistant Superintendent Jacob Cooper has already dramatically cut his district's operating costs. And now, the hike in diesel prices could soon mean classroom resources will be cut.

JACOB COOPER: We are at the whim of global — global politics and the outgrowth of diesel

prices worldwide, which, you know, we're at the mercy of.

NOBLES: Those politics land squarely in the midterm elections, where Washington's nearby 3rd Congressional District is one of the most competitive in the country. Incumbent Marie Gluesenkamp Perez is laying the blame on the Trump administration.

CONGRESSWOMAN MARIE GLUESENKAMP PEREZ (D-WA): It has been a disaster, this war in Iran. It's really thrown, obviously, our fuel markets into chaos, but it's really hurting families.

NOBLES: Her district voted for President Trump, who promised to bring down prices on everything, including gas.

TRUMP [in August 2024]: We will end inflation and make America affordable again.

NOBLES: But inflation has increased since President Trump's return to office, with fuel costs spiking since the start of his war with Iran, something Gluesenkamp Perez's Republican challenger, John Braun, is partly blaming.

JOHN BRAUN: We need to wrap up the — the conflict in Iran as quickly as we can. We got to get a good solution, but sooner, not later.

NOBLES: All of it, as drivers are trying to give their kids a reliable routine. [TO BUS DRIVER] What — I mean, what's your favorite part about being a bus driver?

BUS DRIVER: My favorite part about being a bus driver is seeing a smile on the kids.

MELVIN: Love that.

NOBLES: And there really appears to be no relief in sight, and districts are making dramatic changes. In a national survey conducted by the School Superintendents Association, administrators across the country say they've already started or are looking into limiting field trips, delaying maintenance work, and cutting down on extracurricular and athletic programs, And that is such an important part of the school experience for so many kids.

MELVIN: Yeah.

NOBLES: In some cases, it may go away if these diesel prices continue to go up.

GUTHRIE: We talk so much about farmers and the Midwest, but that is another way those prices are really affecting people.

NOBLES: Yeah, absolutely.

MELVIN: Ryan, glad you went out there and did that. Thank you so much. Thanks for being here

in the studio. Good to see you in person. For a closer look at the midterms, including the latest voting data, our polling page, expert analysis, and more, subscriber-only content, be sure to check out [NBCNews.com](https://www.nbcnews.com), and scan that QR code that's to the right of Steve Kornacki there on your screen.