

PROTECT OUR CARE

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Leslie Dach and Brad Woodhouse, Protect Our Care
DATE: October 14, 2026
RE: This Is a Health Care Election

Introduction

With just under three weeks until the midterm elections, Republicans are scrambling to defend their record on health care, which is a major political liability. Democrats are campaigning on it. Voters are voting on it. And Republicans are paying a price for it.

On July 3, 2025, Republicans may have sealed their fate with voters. Republicans jammed through Congress a party-line budget that threw people's health care into crisis. They passed the largest health care cuts in American history to fund tax breaks for billionaires and big corporations. Despite their best attempts, voters noticed.

Republicans made the largest cut to Medicaid in American history, taking health care from seniors in nursing homes, sick kids, and communities relying on rural hospitals. They ripped away tax credits for health care, causing health insurance premiums to more than double for working families. The results are in. Costs have skyrocketed, hospitals are shutting down, millions have lost coverage, and health care has catapulted to the top of Americans' concerns.

We've been here before. In 2018, health care was the defining issue of the midterms. Democrats ran on it relentlessly, voters rewarded them for it, and the result was a blue wave that flipped the House. As Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi famously [put it](#), "health care was on the ballot, and health care won."

Eight years later, the circumstances are strikingly similar, but the stakes are even more tangible. In 2018, their health care cuts never came into effect. In 2026, voters are feeling the pain and rejecting the reality that Republicans are making them live through.

The fallout of Republican cuts is staggering. In just one year, eight million Americans have lost their health coverage. More than 1,250 hospitals, nursing homes, maternity wards, and other critical providers nationwide have shuttered, face closure, or have cut essential services that families rely on. And it's only getting worse. Soon, strict Medicaid eligibility restrictions will hit, stripping coverage from millions of families and taking away their ability to get the care they need. States will be forced to cut essential programs, including home care for seniors and people with disabilities. And as these cuts ripple throughout our health care system, everyone,

everywhere, will pay the price: research shows that health care costs are going to rise no matter how you get your health insurance.

The Health Care Crisis Is Playing Out in Battleground States

The health care crisis created by Trump and Republicans is playing out in communities across the country and shaping competitive races that will determine control of Congress. Local headlines are documenting how hospital closures, rising costs, and Medicaid cuts are at the center of the political landscape.

- [Washington Post](#): How the Fate of a Rural Hospital Could Help Flip the House
- [NC Newswire \(North Carolina\)](#): Healthcare Costs, Medicaid Cuts Draw Increased Scrutiny From NC Democrats Ahead of Midterms
- [Athens Messenger \(Ohio\)](#): Rising Healthcare Costs Leave Ohioans Wanting Action Ahead of Midterm Elections
- [Texas Tribune \(Texas\)](#): With Costs Up, Healthcare a Defining Issue in South Texas' Battleground House Races
- [WAMU \(Virginia\)](#): Healthcare Affordability Is Shaping Competitive Races Ahead of the Midterm Elections

These stories show a broader pattern happening from coast to coast. A hospital closing means an elderly neighbor must drive over an hour to the nearest hospital after her husband suffers a fall. A premium increase means the family down the street must debate whether they can afford groceries this week. Medicaid cuts mean a child with cerebral palsy can no longer attend the therapy that was helping him gain the strength to walk. **When those consequences are being felt in communities at the same time voters are deciding who will represent them in Congress, health care takes the spotlight.**

Republicans Are Losing The Fight

Democrats "absolutely should be running on health care. It is a big win for them," and health care is their "secret weapon." — Harry Enten, CNN

The political salience of health care is also reflected in national polling. Voters have told us [loud](#) and [clear](#) that affordability is their top concern, and [health care costs](#) have overtaken food, housing, and gas prices as Americans' top financial concern. According to the latest poll from [KFF](#): "Six in ten voters are worried about being able to afford their health care costs, and about half of voters say it is 'extremely important' for candidates in the midterm elections to talk about the cost of health care—ranking alongside the cost of living as the top two issues voters want to hear candidates talk about in the closing weeks of the midterm campaigns."

Recent polling shows just how far Republicans have fallen behind — what Quinnipiac University Polling Analyst Tim Malloy [called](#) “a warning light flashing red for the GOP scrambling to stay in power.”

- [The New York Times](#): The Trump administration’s handling of health care costs has landed them [37 points](#) underwater.
- [The New York Times](#): “Democrats hold a 24-point trust advantage over Republicans on health care — higher than the advantage they held in 2018.”
- [NBC News](#): “Healthcare is shaping up to be a vulnerability for the GOP in the [2026 midterm elections](#), when Democrats hope to capture the House and the Senate. According to this month’s [NBC News poll](#), voters trust Democrats over Republicans on healthcare by 22 points.”
- [Quinnipiac University](#): 55% of voters trust Democrats to handle health care, compared to just 31% who trust Republicans.
- [KFF](#): Rural Americans report that Trump’s health care agenda has impacted their lives negatively, with 66% of rural Americans saying they are “very” or “somewhat” worried about being able to afford health care.
- [AP-Norc](#): “Voters are more likely to say they trust the Democratic Party than the Republican Party to do a better job handling health care” (44-24)

Ad Spending Reveals That Health Care Is Driving Campaigns

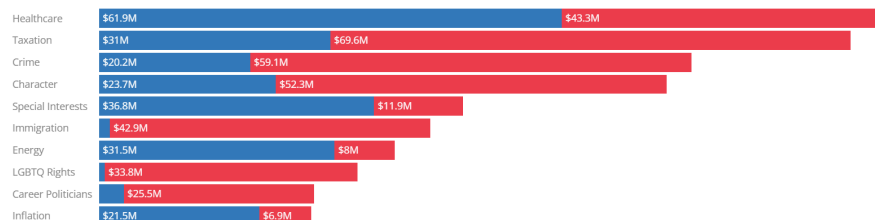
Health care is a defining part of the political conversation among candidates regardless of party affiliation. The Cook Political Report’s Battleground Issue Tracker, which analyzes campaign advertising across competitive House and Senate races nationwide, finds that health care is the number one issue in Senate advertising and the number two issue in House advertising, behind only taxes. According to the [Washington Post](#), Democrats have spent \$400 million on health care ads — more than 1.5 times as much as Republicans on the issue.

Senate

Top 10 Issues in Senate General Ads in Competitive Races by Ad Spending

[Click to view by ad airings](#)

■ Democrat ■ Republican



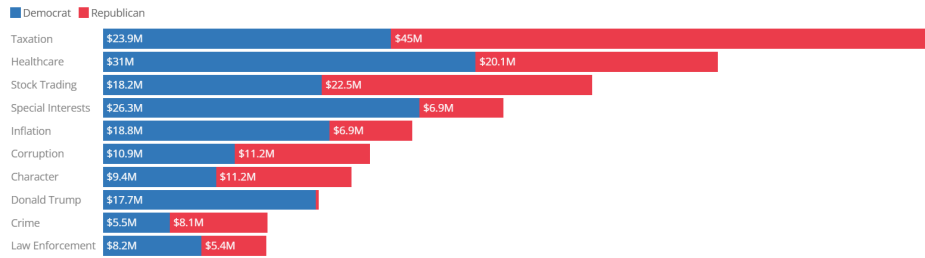
January 1 - September 28, 2026
Source: AdImpact

Races included: AK (\$15.5M), IA (\$43.1M), KS (\$5.1M), ME (\$66.8M), MI (\$47.9M), NC (\$44.1M), NH (\$13.3M), OH Special (\$110.8M), TX (\$95.6M)

House

Top 10 Issues in House General Ads in Competitive Races by Spend

[Click to view by ad airings](#)



January 1 - September 28, 2026
Source: AdImpact

Races included: AZ-01 (\$5.2M), AZ-06 (\$6.8M), CA-13 (\$2.0M), CA-22 (\$8.8M), CA-48 (\$2.1M), CO-05 (\$1.7M), CO-08 (\$8.8M), FL-13 (\$678.4K), FL-14 (\$2.5M), FL-22 (\$423.1K), FL-25 (\$5.4M), FL-27 (\$506.5K), IA-01 (\$22.7M), IA-02 (\$7.1M), IA-03 (\$7.3M), MI-04 (\$6.0M), MI-07 (\$4.3M), MI-10 (\$2.2M), MT-01 (\$975.9K), NC-01 (\$9.8M), NC-11 (\$3.6M), NE-02 (\$3.3M), NJ-07 (\$6.1M), NM-02 (\$3.4M), NV-03 (\$2.3M), NY-03 (\$4.7M), NY-17 (\$7.9M), OH-01 (\$2.6M), OH-07 (\$4.5M), OH-09 (\$5.5M), PA-07 (\$4.9M), PA-08 (\$7.5M), PA-10 (\$6.0M), TX-15 (\$5.0M), TX-28 (\$3.1M), TX-34 (\$7.4M), TX-35 (\$1.6M), VA-01 (\$5.4M), VA-02 (\$5.1M), WA-03 (\$7.5M), WI-01 (\$2.9M), WI-03 (\$7.2M)

[VIEW THE 2026 HOUSE TRENDLINES \(CPR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY\)](#)

The bottom line: 2026 is a health care election. History shows what happens when health care becomes the central issue in a midterm election. With cuts showing up in kitchen-table budgets, doctors' offices, hospital emergency rooms, and communities across the country, health care is uniquely powerful heading into November as voters are not just hearing about Republican health care cuts, they're living with them.

After November, it's up to Democrats to keep up the fight to deliver relief to families and make health care affordable and accessible for every American. As Leader Jeffries [put](#) it: **"Democrats are fighting hard to cancel the cuts...lower the costs...and save your health care."**