PROTECT
OUR CARE

★★★ 2026 MIDTERMS REPORT

THE 2026 MIDTERMS WERE A HEALTH CARE ELECTION

How Republican cuts, rising costs, and Democratic health care messaging shaped the election.

> *A lot of races are finishing on health care. It's the No. 1 cost-of-living issue where Democrats have the biggest advantage.*
>
> — CELINDA LAKE, DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST, IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

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SECTION 01

A REFERENDUM ON HEALTH CARE



SEIU CAREGIVERS RALLY AGAINST REPUBLICAN MEDICAID CUTS — WASHINGTON, D.C.

The 2026 midterm elections were a referendum on Donald Trump and Republicans' war on health care, and voters delivered a clear verdict. After Republicans slashed $1 trillion from Medicaid and ripped away health care tax credits to pay for tax breaks for billionaires and big corporations, families across the country were left facing higher costs, coverage losses, and growing threats to the hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and other providers their communities depend on. Democrats made these consequences impossible to ignore. They stood united against the Republican health care cuts, fought to protect coverage and lower costs, and took that fight directly to voters. In race after race, health care became a central point of contrast and a defining issue in the election.

The fight began with Republicans' passage of H.R. 1. Democrats stood united in opposition as Republicans jammed through the largest health care cuts in history, gutting Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act while handing out massive tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans and corporations. Democrats warned that the law would rip coverage away from millions of people, drive up costs for working families, and put hospitals and essential providers at risk, especially in rural communities. Republicans tried to sell the legislation as a win for American families, but the consequences of their vote quickly became impossible to hide.

Democrats kept fighting to protect coverage and hold Republicans accountable. When Republicans ripped away the health care tax credits that helped more than 22 million Americans afford coverage, Democrats made extending them the central demand in the fight over the government shutdown. The shutdown ended without an agreement to protect the tax credits, but Democrats did not let the issue go. House Democrats remained united, with all 214 members signing a discharge petition led by House Democratic Leader Hakeem

Jeffries to force a vote on a three-year extension. The House passed the extension, but Republicans in the Senate blocked any further progress.

Democrats then made health care a centerpiece of their campaigns. They connected the votes in Washington to the real-life consequences playing out in communities across the country: families struggling with skyrocketing premiums and prescription costs, people losing coverage, rural hospitals fighting to stay open, and patients worried about losing access to the care they need. Democratic candidates held town halls and roundtables, shared the stories of patients and health care workers, challenged Republican incumbents to defend their votes, and made clear who was fighting to protect health care and who had voted to rip it away.

The campaign spending reflected that focus. Democrats invested $239 million in health care advertising — more than one and a half times what Republicans spent on the issue. Health care was the top issue in Democratic House and Senate advertising, according to the Cook Political Report, and Democrats spent $216 million on ads connecting affordability to health care costs. They made the stakes clear: health care is not separate from affordability. It is one of the biggest costs facing families, and Republicans' policies were making it worse.

Voters were paying attention. Poll after poll showed that health care costs ranked among Americans' biggest financial concerns and that voters trusted Democrats more than Republicans to handle the issue. After the election, KFF found that roughly four in ten voters named health care among their top three issues, six in ten were very concerned about health care costs, and Democrats held a 20-point advantage over Republicans on which party voters trusted to handle health care.

> *"A lot of races are finishing on [health care]. It's the No. 1 cost-of-living issue where Democrats have the biggest advantage."*
>
> **— CELINDA LAKE, A DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST IN THE NEW YORK TIMES**

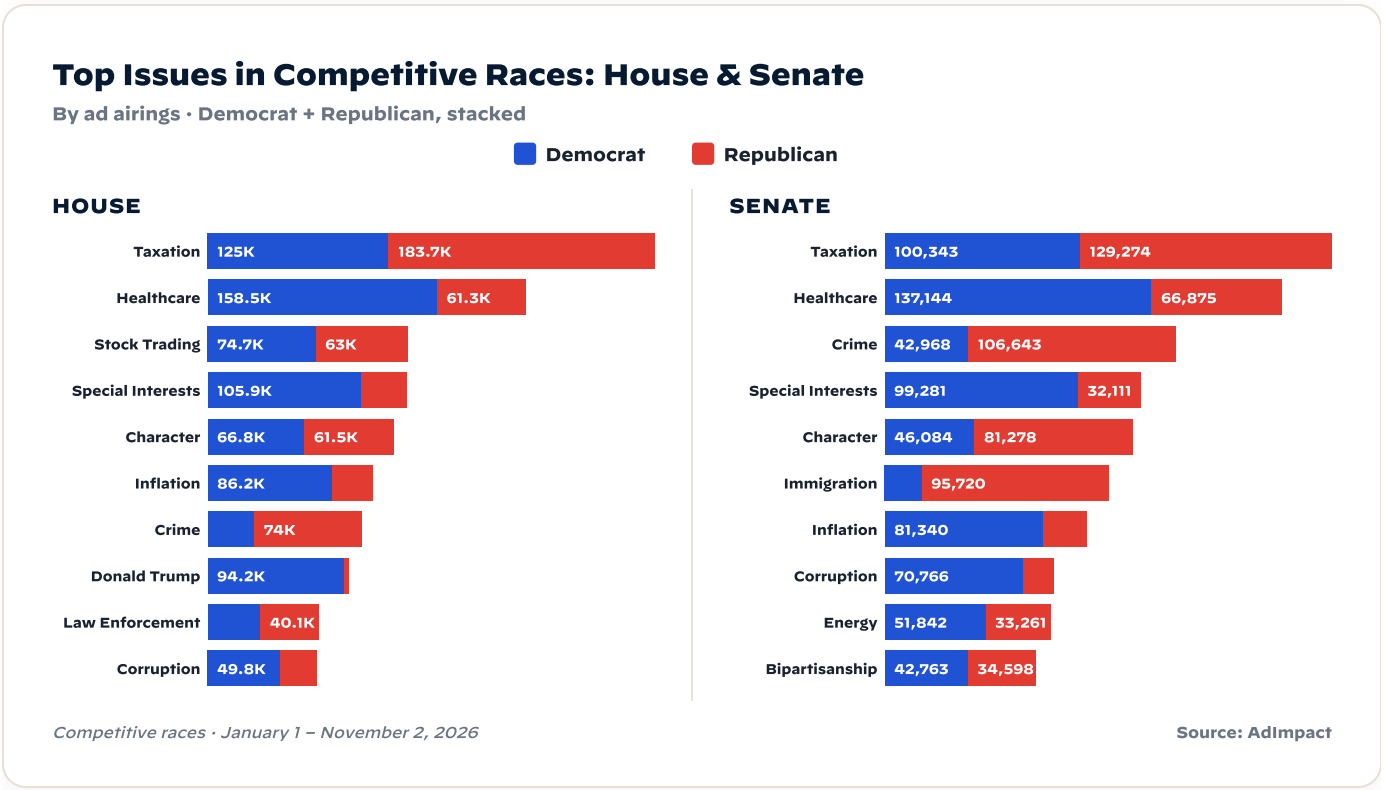
The results told the story across the country. Democrats flipped Republican-held Senate seats in Iowa, Maine, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, and South Carolina, while winning key House races by making Republican health care cuts a central issue. In competitive districts, like CA-22 and NY-17, Democratic candidates put their opponents' votes for H.R. 1 front and center, and connected those votes to the coverage losses and rising costs facing their constituents. In state after state, voters heard the same choice: protect health care and lower costs or stand with Republicans who ripped coverage away and made care more expensive.

SECTION 02

AD SPENDING

> *"In an election focused on affordability, Democrats' messaging on health care costs appears to have resonated with voters and may have contributed to the party's gains."*
>
> **— LIZ HAMEL, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC OPINION AND SURVEY RESEARCH, KFF**

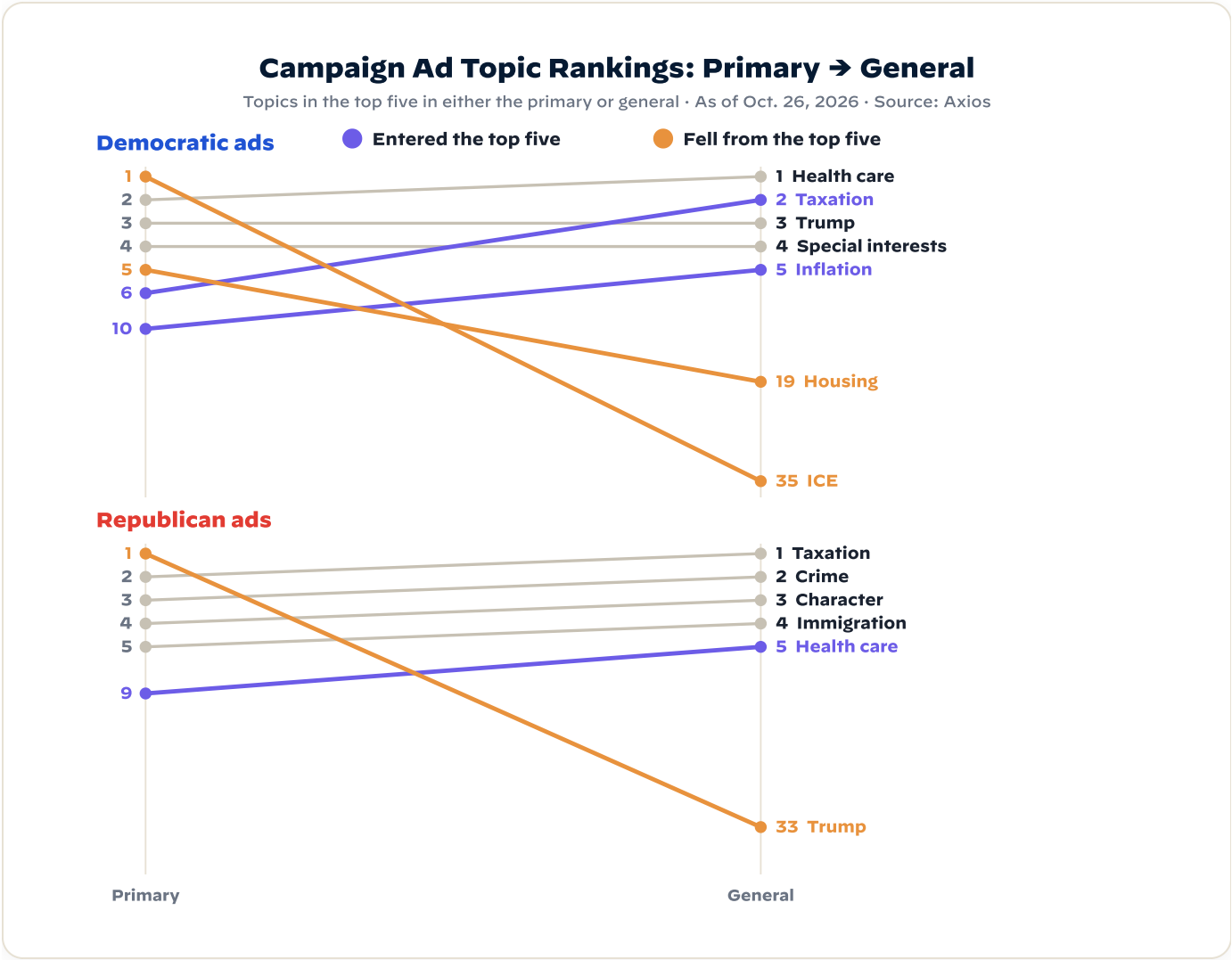
Democrats made health care their biggest advertising investment, spending $239 million on health care ads — more than 1.5 times as much as Republicans on the issue, according to The Washington Post.



Similarly, 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 and House advertising by the Democrats. When combined

with Republican ads, health care is the number two issue across the board, only behind taxation.

Health care has also been a major part of Democrats' broader affordability message. According to Politico, Democratic TV ads connecting affordability and health care costs accounted for $216 million in spending — more than half of all Democratic affordability-themed advertising. These ads frequently called out Republicans for threatening Medicare and Medicaid, tying the GOP's health care agenda directly to the rising costs families are facing.

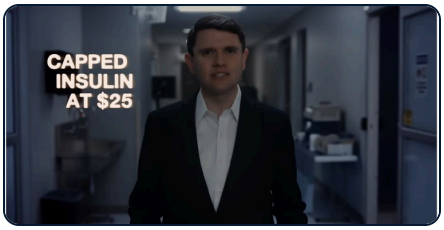


According to Axios, Democrats kept the focus on health care during both the primaries and the general election. Republicans, on the other hand, only began focusing on health care for the general election.

The data underscores how prominently health care has featured in competitive races across the country, with Democrats making it a central focus of campaigns up and down the ballot.

Take a look at some of the winning ads below:

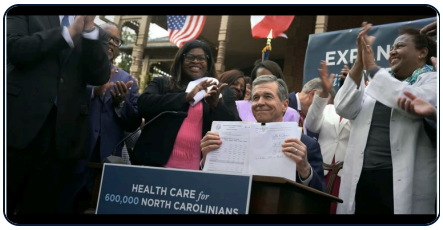
ON THE AIR: HEALTH CARE ADS THIS CYCLE



James Talarico (TX) — capping insulin at $25



Dr. Annie Andrews (SC) — lowering health care costs



Roy Cooper (NC) — coverage for 600,000



Scott Colom (MS) — saving rural hospitals



Rebecca Cooke (WI-03) — fixing the system



Calling out the insurance companies

SENATE



KS SENATE, ADAM HAMILTON

► "Health Care Gap"

We all feel it. The gap in America between how things are and how they're supposed to be. I'm Adam Hamilton and I'm running for the United States Senate. Everyone deserves health care. So when Roger Marshall cuts health care, that's not who we are. We need a senator who will fight to lower the cost of prescriptions, stop the cuts, expand coverage, and save rural hospitals from closing. I approve this message because we can and must do better. Adam Hamilton for Senate. It's time for something different.



SC SENATE, DR. ANNIE ANDREWS

► "White Coat"

When I put on this coat, I carry the weight of every patient's trust. We should expect the same from our leaders. I'm Dr. Annie Andrews. I'm a mom to three kids and a pediatrician. I'm running for Senate to lower health care costs, go after insurance companies ripping us off, and I'll work with Republicans to cut taxes, and keep your family safe. I approve this message because my life's work has been about helping people. You deserve a senator who does the same.



TX SENATE, JAMES TALARICO

► "Insulin"

When I was 28, I almost died. I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. When I picked up my first insulin prescription, it cost me $684. I couldn't afford that. Most Texans can't either. So, when I got to the Texas House, I took on big pharma and capped insulin at $25 a month. I'm James Talarico. I know what it means to fight for my life. I approve this message because in the Senate, I'll fight for yours.



IA SENATE, JOSH TUREK

► "Went Through Hell"

In Vietnam. I spent 22 months over there. They were using Agent Orange. It caused my son Josh Turek to be born with spina bifida. I went through the war, but Josh went through hell. He knows better than most what Iowans are going through now. Washington taking away health care coverage. People forced to travel hours to see a doctor. Josh is a fighter, and he will take this personal. He really wants to improve people's lives. He won't ever stop working to make it right. I'm Josh Turek and I approve this message.

HOUSE



WI-03, REBECCA COOKE

► "Not Prioritizing Healthcare"

We were thinking about having another child and then I found out that the labor and delivery unit in our town had closed. I was really surprised. Derrick Van Orden has voted to make huge cuts to Medicare and to Medicaid, which puts hospitals at greater risk of closing or reducing services. It's not putting access to health care as a priority. Rebecca Cooke will listen to the people rather than special interests. I'm Rebecca Cooke and I approve this message.



OH-09, MARCY KAPTUR

► "Works For Us"

Ohio's less than 60 miles from Canada, but we pay up to 5 times more for our prescriptions. Why? Because the big drug companies buy off corrupt politicians like Derek Merrin. Dirty Derek's in so deep to them, he'd not only raise your premiums, he'd cut your Medicare. Well, they can't buy me. I worked with Republicans to write the bill, making it harder for the big drug companies to jack up their prices, and I'll never cut your Medicare. I'm Marcy Kaptur, and I approve this message.



IA-02, LINDSAY JAMES

► "Policy"

When I was out knocking doors, I met someone facing an impossible choice. Pay rent and keep his house or buy insulin and keep his foot. Joe Mitchell supports the policies forcing Iowans into these choices, making it harder to see a doctor and closing rural hospitals. That's wrong. I'm a chaplain. When it comes to my faith, caring for my neighbor is not optional. That's why I'm running for Congress. I'm Lindsay James and I approve this message.



AZ-06, JOANNA MENDOZA

► "Town Hall"

Growing up, my parents were farm workers. Like many Arizonans, hard work didn't come with health insurance. As a kid, I used Medicaid access for my health care. That health care allowed me to serve my country for 20 years. Arizonans work hard to provide for their families. But politicians are making that nearly impossible. I'm running for Congress cuz I'm going to fight every day to lower costs and make health care affordable for the people of this district. I'm JoAnna Mendoza and I approve this message.

SECTION 03

A CLOSER LOOK: HOW HEALTH CARE DEFINED KEY HOUSE RACES



"SICK OF IT" HEALTH CARE ADVOCATES RALLY OUTSIDE THE U.S. CAPITOL.

CA-22: Randy Villegas Defeats David Valadao

In California's 22nd congressional district, where Democratic challenger Randy Villegas made health care a central issue, Republican incumbent David Valadao lost his reelection bid.

More Residents in CA-22 Rely on Medicaid Than All But One District In the Country. 62% of residents of California's 22nd district rely on Medicaid for health care.

Valadao Voted For Trump's Sweeping Health Care Cuts. David Valadao voted for the largest health care cuts in history, which included slashing more than $1 trillion from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, to pay for tax cuts for billionaires and big corporations. As a result, health care costs are skyrocketing, coverage is disappearing, and hospitals, clinics, and essential service providers are closing, cutting services, or are at risk of doing so. Valadao cast the deciding vote despite promising to protect Medicaid and continued to lie throughout his campaign, trying to claim that there were no cuts to Medicaid. Now, more than 1,720,000 Californians have already lost their Medicaid, CHIP, or ACA coverage since Valadao and Republicans gutted health care, and four providers in CA-22 have closed or announced cuts. According to KFF, 1.7 million Californians are expected to go uninsured by 2034 as a result of Republican health care cuts.

Villegas Made Protecting Health Care a Central Part of His Campaign. Villegas listed health care second on his website's issue page, saying, "We need a fair, efficient health care system that actually looks after us instead of ripping us off, and is simple and accessible to use."

Villegas grew up relying on Medicaid and repeatedly connected his personal experience to the threat Republicans' health care cuts posed to Central Valley families. On August 21, Villegas held a "Guaranteed Healthcare Town Hall" with Rep. Ro Khanna and California Nurses Association President Sandy Reding.

> ► **"The Valley vs. Washington"**
>
> *We have our work, our values, each other. It's the only way we get by. I used to think David Valadao understood that. He took money from the health insurance companies and PG&E. He takes their money, and he does their bidding. Gutting Medi-Cal while big pharma CEOs get rich. Electric companies hike our bills but get tax cuts from him. He turned his back on the valley, on working families like mine, like Randy's.*



Q5: Favor or oppose reducing federal funding for Medi-Cal? (CA-22) · Sample: 1,350 CA residents 18+
Source: 2025 CHCF Congressional District Policy Survey

A Majority of CA-22 Residents Were Opposed to Medicaid Cuts No Matter What Political Party. In March 2025, just months before Republicans slashed health care by gutting $1 trillion from Medicaid, a poll from NORC at the University of Chicago found strong bipartisan opposition to Medicaid cuts, including 79% of Democrats, 68% of Independents, and 70% of Republicans. David Valadao voted for them anyway.

NY-17: Cait Conley Defeats Mike Lawler

In New York's 17th congressional district, where Democratic challenger Cait Conley made health care a central issue, Republican incumbent Mike Lawler lost his reelection bid.

Lawler Voted For Trump's Sweeping Health Care Cuts. Mike Lawler voted for the largest health care cuts in history, which included slashing more than $1 trillion from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act and eliminating funding for New York's expanded Essential Plan, to pay for tax cuts for billionaires and big corporations. As a result, health care costs are skyrocketing, coverage is disappearing, and hospitals, clinics, and essential service providers are closing, cutting services, or are at risk of doing so.

New Yorkers in NY-17 Lost Health Care Because of Republican Cuts. Over 550,000 New Yorkers have already lost their Medicaid, CHIP, or ACA coverage since Lawler and

Republicans gutted health care, and two hospitals in NY-17 are at risk. According to New York State of Health, nearly 14,000 residents of NY-17 lost coverage after Republicans cut funding for the Essential Plan, forcing them to face higher costs.

Conley Made Reversing The Republican Health Care Cuts And Lowering Health Care Costs A Central Part Of Her Campaign. On her website, Conley declared, "Every American should have the right to access affordable healthcare" and listed one of her first priorities as "lower[ing] the cost of drugs and healthcare premiums by holding Big Pharma and insurance companies accountable." She connected her health care priorities to her own family's experience, explaining her father worked in construction and could not always afford health care despite his need to stay healthy in order to earn a living.

> ▶ **"The Difference Between Cait Conley and Mike Lawler"**
>
> *Looks like Cait's a combat vet. Served six tours, three bronze stars. Mike Lawler, I guess he was a utility lobbyist and a political consultant. He takes thousands of dollars from pharma, health insurance interests, and then voted to raise our costs. You got to be kidding me. This guy, he votes with Trump 100% of the time. Oh, he's definitely not in it for us.*

Conley Directly Connected Lawler's Vote to the Loss of Health Coverage for New York Families. In a debate on October 1, Conley attacked Lawler for voting for Republican health care cuts, saying, "He voted for the one big, ugly bill that was record cuts to Medicaid that have impacted nearly half a million New Yorkers, forcing them off of their health insurance between Medicaid cuts and rescinding the premium tax credits." In an earlier debate, Lawler tried to deflect blame for Republican cuts, lying about the harm the cuts have caused New York families.

VA-02: Elaine Luria Defeats Jen Kiggans

In Virginia's 2nd congressional district, where Democratic challenger Elaine Luria made the threat to local health care a central issue in her campaign, Republican incumbent Jen Kiggans lost her reelection bid.

VA-02's Rural Health Care System Is at Risk. Bon Secours Southampton Medical Center in Franklin was identified by Virginia's bipartisan Joint Commission on Health Care as one of five rural hospitals in the state at imminent risk of closure. The hospital serves a community that relies on Medicaid, and patients could have to travel roughly 40 minutes farther to reach another hospital if it closes.

> WASHINGTON POST
> How the Fate of a Rural Hospital Could Help Flip the House

Kiggans Voted For Trump's Sweeping Health Care Cuts. Jen Kiggans voted for the largest health care cuts in history, which included slashing more than $1 trillion from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act to pay for tax cuts for billionaires and big corporations. As a result, health care costs are skyrocketing, coverage is disappearing, and hospitals, clinics, and essential service providers are closing, cutting services, or are at risk of doing so.

Virginians Are Losing Health Care and Hospitals Are Losing Funding. Over 237,232 Virginians have already lost their Medicaid, CHIP, or ACA coverage since Kiggans and Republicans gutted health care. Republican health care cuts mean Virginia hospitals are projected to lose $36.9 billion in funding over the next decade. The $189 million Virginia received through the Rural Health Transformation Fund is just a fraction of the billions in Medicaid funding the state is projected to lose.

Luria Focused on Protecting Local Health Care. Elaine Luria repeatedly warned that Kiggans' vote for Republican health care cuts threatened rural hospitals and access to care across the district. In August, she held a health care roundtable in Franklin, where residents shared personal stories about the importance of Bon Secours Southampton Medical Center and the consequences if it were forced to close. Luria also campaigned on restoring the health care tax credits and Medicaid funding, lowering prescription drug costs, and expanding access to telehealth, mobile clinics, and community health centers.

SECTION 04

HEALTH CARE DOMINATED ELECTION COVERAGE ACROSS THE COUNTRY

As the midterm elections crept closer, news outlets noticed the role health care was playing in voters' choices and made the case in hundreds of articles over the past few months. Some highlights are below:

THE AMERICAN PROSPECT
The Midterm Election Was About Health Care

THE HILL
Healthcare Powers Democrats' Midterm Rout: 4 Takeaways

WORD IN BLACK
Angry Voters Put Health Care on the Agenda. Now Comes the Repair Work.

THE BULWARK
Why 2026 Is a Health Care Election

THE HILL
Republicans Struggle for an Answer to Democrats' Medicaid Attacks

POLITICO
Republicans Tried to Punt Health Care Cuts Until After the Midterms. It Didn't Work.

VOX
Why Healthcare Has Become Such a Big Problem for Republicans

WASHINGTON POST
How the Fate of a Rural Hospital Could Help Flip the House

POLITICO
Medicaid Cuts Haunt Republicans in Battleground States

WASHINGTON POST
Health Brief: Health Care Could Be a Political Tipping Point

KFF HEALTH NEWS
Medicaid Cuts Take Center Stage In The Fight For Battleground State Voters

WASHINGTON POST
Health Brief: Election Watch | Rising Health Costs Become a Key Issue in Governors' Races

SCRANTON TIMES-TRIBUNE PENNSYLVANIA
Election 2026: Healthcare Affordability Concerns Galvanize Voters

KATU OREGON
Clark County Voters Weigh Affordability, Health Care, Education and Wars Ahead of November

WMBF SOUTH CAROLINA
South Carolina Voters Cite Health Care, Affordability Ahead of Senate Election

ACTION5NEWS TENNESSEE

Memphis Voters Cite Economy, Health Care, and Local Issues as Early Voting Numbers Outpace 2022

NC NEWSLINE 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

NPR FLORIDA

A Lot of Floridians Lost Their Healthcare This Year. Now, They're Heading to the Polls

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN NEWS MICHIGAN

Who Will Rural Voters Blame for Harmful Healthcare Changes, Policies This Election?

VIRGINIA MERCURY VIRGINIA

Virginia Democrats Warn More Healthcare Strains Loom After November Election

SECTION 05

NATIONAL POLLING CONFIRMS: HEALTH CARE IS THE TOP ISSUE

National polling illustrates a clear pattern: health care was one of the defining issues for voters in the 2026 midterms. As costs climbed and Republicans faced growing backlash over their health care cuts, polling consistently showed that voters trusted Democrats more than Republicans to address the issue, which, in turn, turned more voters out for Democrats.

POLLING SHOWS HEALTH CARE WAS A TOP ISSUE FOR VOTERS

NOVEMBER 2026

KFF Poll Finds Health Care Costs Among Voters' Biggest Financial Concerns.
59% of voters said they were very concerned about the cost of health care, putting it alongside gas and groceries as the leading financial concerns for Americans. Concern about health care costs increased 5 percentage points from 2024 after Republicans slashed $1 trillion from Medicaid and ripped away health care tax credits that helped millions see a doctor.

NOVEMBER 2026

Washington Post/NORC Survey Finds Health Care Ranked Among Voters' Top Issues.
Health care ranked second among 12 issues voters identified as important to their vote, only behind economy and jobs.

NOVEMBER 2026

KFF Finds Voters Deeply Concerned About Trump Administration's Impact on Health Care.
56% of voters said the Trump administration had made the ability to get health care worse, while 55% said their own health care costs had gotten worse. 58% said the administration had made the health of Americans worse.

OCTOBER 2026

Gallup Finds Health Care Among the Most Important Issues for Midterm Voters.
50% of registered voters said health care would be "extremely important" to their vote for Congress this year, putting it alongside the economy at the top of voters' priorities.

OCTOBER 2026

Families USA Finds Health Care Costs Are a Top Priority for Nearly Half of Voters.
47% of voters named health care as a top priority for Congress and the President. The survey found that concern crossed party lines, with 81% of Republicans and 79% of Trump voters saying it was important for the President and Congress to lower health care costs.

SEPTEMBER 2026

KFF Finds Six in Ten Americans Are Worried About Affording Health Care.
62% of adults said they were "very" or "somewhat" worried about being able to afford health care for themselves and their families, tying gasoline as a leading economic concern.

AUGUST 2026

KFF/AP Poll Finds Health Care Costs Are a Top Concern for Rural Voters.

Two-thirds of rural voters said they were "very" or "somewhat" worried about being able to afford health care for themselves and their families. More than half of rural voters also disapproved of Trump's handling of health care. Roughly twice as many said the administration's policies had negatively impacted their health care costs as said they had positively impacted them.

AND DEMOCRATS HAD A CLEAR ADVANTAGE ON HEALTH CARE

NOVEMBER 2026

KFF Finds Democrats Hold Their Biggest Advantage Over Republicans on Health Care.

50% of voters said the Democratic Party was better equipped to handle health care, compared with just 30% who said the same about Republicans.

OCTOBER 2026

KFF Finds Democrats Hold Nearly a Two-To-One Advantage on Health Care Costs.

Voters trust Democrats over Republicans to handle health care costs by 42% to 22%.

SEPTEMBER 2026

Quinnipiac Poll Finds Voters Trust Democrats Over Republicans on Health Care by 24 Points.

55% of voters said the Democratic Party would do a better job handling health care, compared with just 31% who said the same about Republicans.

SEPTEMBER 2026

NBC News Poll Finds Voters Trust Democrats Over Republicans on Health Care by 22 Points.

The poll found that voters trusted Democrats over Republicans on health care by a 22-point margin.

WHICH TURNED OUT VOTERS FOR THEM

NOVEMBER 2026

KFF Finds Voters Concerned About Health Care Costs Turned Out for Democrats in Key Senate Races.

In competitive Senate races in Alaska, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas, around two-thirds of voters who were very concerned about health care costs voted for Democratic candidates, compared with roughly three in ten who voted Republican.

NOVEMBER 2026

KFF Finds Voters Who Blamed Trump Administration Policies for Rising Health Care Costs Overwhelmingly Voted Democratic.

Among voters who said Trump administration policies had made their own health care costs worse, 83% voted for Democratic House candidates. That included 72% of independents and 22% of Republicans who said their costs had worsened.

SECTION 06

REPUBLICANS TRY TO REWRITE THEIR RECORDS



"MEDICAID CUTS KILL" — DEMONSTRATORS RALLY AGAINST REPUBLICAN HEALTH CARE CUTS OUTSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE.

As Republicans faced growing backlash over their votes to gut health care, they tried to defend their record by arguing the cuts were necessary to root out waste, fraud, and abuse while covering up the cuts they made by touting the Rural Health Transformation Fund as proof they were protecting rural hospitals and communities. But their lies gloss over the real consequences of the law: cutting more than $1 trillion from health care will cause millions of Americans to lose life-saving coverage, and put hospitals, nursing homes, and other providers at risk of closing or cutting services.

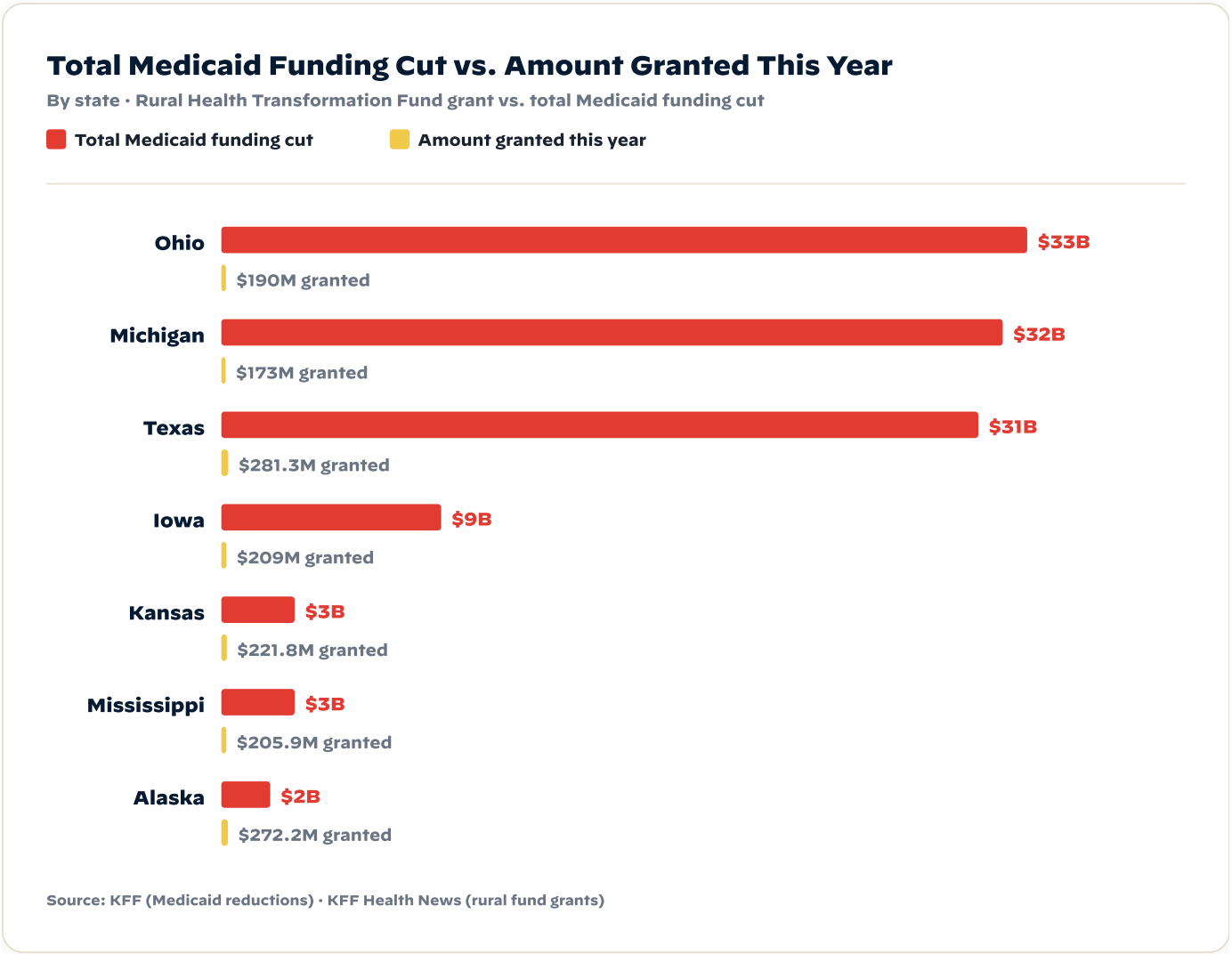
Rural Health Transformation Fund

Across the country, Republican candidates and elected officials made the rural health fund a centerpiece of their defense. On the campaign trail, Republican Senators Roger Marshall (KS), Jon Husted (OH), Susan Collins (ME), and Ted Cruz (TX), and Representatives Juan Ciscomani (AZ-06), Jeff Crank (CO-05), Mariannette Miller-Meeks (IA-01), Jason Smith (MO-08), and Derrick Van Orden (WI-03), touted the fund as evidence that Republicans were delivering for rural hospitals and families — but these claims conveniently left out the much larger cuts Republicans made to the health care system.

In Maine, for example:

> **▶ "Rural Hospitals"**
>
> *Susan Collins secured 190 million dollars in federal funding for Maine's rural hospitals, the largest federal investment in rural healthcare in more than 20 years. Rural healthcare systems need critical upgrades to aging equipment and facilities. These funds provide the resources to deliver the increased and improved local care that Mainers deserve. As Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, there is no better fighter and champion for all of Maine than Susan Collins.*

Yet Maine is projected to lose $3 billion in federal Medicaid funding over the next decade, while receiving just $190 million through the fund. The amount Maine is receiving through the fund pales in comparison to the amount they are losing. The same imbalance is playing out across the country:



Rural health care leaders themselves have warned that these funds won't come close to undoing the damage of Trump and Republicans' cuts to Medicaid. Jed Hansen, the executive director of the Nebraska Rural Health Association, said, "[The] Rural Health Transformation will not save a single hospital in our state. I don't think it will save a single hospital nationally."

Republicans were holding up a limited pool of money as proof they were protecting rural health care, while ignoring the much larger cuts they had voted to impose on those same communities.

Waste, Fraud, and Abuse

Republicans also leaned on claims about waste, fraud, and abuse to change the subject as they tried to turn attention away from affordability and the consequences of their own health care cuts. They argued that cracking down on improper payments would make Medicaid more efficient and help bring down costs but that did little to address what families were actually experiencing like higher costs, rising medical bills, coverage losses, and fewer options for care. Eliminating fraud does not lower a family's monthly premium, make a prescription more affordable, or ensure a local hospital can keep its doors open. Even Republican health policy advisor Joel White acknowledged the disconnect, telling The New York Times, "Very few people make the leap to say if you reduce fraud, I will pay less, this will make things more affordable. Republicans kind of hung their hat on the fraud and abuse angle and tried to make the affordability argument, and it's kind of falling flat."

Ultimately, Republicans tried to defend their votes by presenting the big, ugly bill as a crackdown on waste and an investment in rural health care. But no amount of campaign messaging could erase the central contradiction: Republicans voted to slash more than $1 trillion out of health care, then pointed to a far smaller fund and promises to eliminate fraud as evidence that communities would be protected. The gap between what Republicans promised and what their actions would actually mean for patients, families, hospitals, and providers was impossible to hide.

SECTION 07

A DEEPER DIVE: HEALTH CARE IN KEY SENATE RACES



ADVOCATES TURN OUT FOR A "SICK OF IT – FIX HEALTH CARE NOW" BUS TOUR STOP.

Iowa

Iowans Hit Hard by Republican Health Care Cuts. An estimated 21,058 Iowans dropped the ACA health care coverage they relied on after Republicans ripped away the tax credits and premiums skyrocketed. As of November, 22 Iowa health care facilities are at-risk, announced cuts, are closing, or have closed. Three Iowa maternity wards have already closed, and a fourth is shuttering by the end of the year. 110,000 Iowans in total are anticipated to become uninsured between 2025 and 2034 as a result of Republicans' cuts.

Iowa

44.9K Taxation · Special Interests · Healthcare

46.5K Taxation · Healthcare · Bipartisanship

Top ad issues by airings · Source: AdImpact

Health Care Was One of The Most-Mentioned Issues In Iowa Political Ads. According to AdImpact, as of October 14, health care was in the top three issues mentioned in both

Democratic and Republican advertising.

Recent Polls Show Health Care To Be a Top Issue In Race For Senate. According to an October 2026 poll from Emerson College, health care was the second most important issue facing Iowa voters, behind only the economy. 18% named health care as the top issue facing the state. According to Spencer Kimball, executive director of Emerson College Polling, "voters who find healthcare or threats to democracy to be the top issue facing the state break for the Democratic candidates by double digits." A Searchlight Institute poll found that 44% of Iowa voters named health care as one of the three most important issues in their Senate vote.

Candidates Made Health Care a Central Point of Contrast. According to Iowa Public Radio, Democratic Senate candidate Josh Turek held health care roundtables with Iowa residents and health care workers as he campaigned on the issue. Turek focused on the consequences of Republicans' health care cuts, while Republican Ashley Hinson defended her party's record.

Headlines

NEWSWEEK
Health Care May Be Josh Turek's Best Weapon Against Ashley Hinson

POLITICO
Health Care Shakes Up the Iowa Election

IOWA PUBLIC RADIO
In Iowa's Competitive Races, Senate Candidates Lean Into Healthcare Issues

OUTCOME **Josh Turek defeated Ashley Hinson, flipping a Republican-held seat.**

Maine

Mainers Faced Growing Health Care Affordability Challenges. An estimated 23,186 Mainers have already lost the Medicaid, CHIP, or ACA coverage they counted on to see a doctor after Republicans gutted health care. By May 2026, nearly 14,300 returning consumers had canceled their coverage — a 50% increase over the same point in 2025. As of early November, 20 Maine health care providers are at-risk, announced cuts, are closing, or have closed. 33,000 Mainers in total are anticipated to become uninsured between 2025 and 2034.

Maine

30.2K Trump · Healthcare · Abortion

46.5K Healthcare · Special Interests · Taxation

Top ad issues by airings · Source: AdImpact

Health Care Was One of The Most-Mentioned Issues In Maine Political Ads. According to AdImpact, as of October 14, health care was in the top three issues mentioned in both Democratic and Republican advertising.

Health Care Was a Major Concern for Maine Voters. In a post-election survey by Searchlight Institute, 41% of Maine voters named health care as one of the three most important issues in their vote for Senate, behind only the cost of living and corruption. KFF also found that of voters who were concerned about health care, 67% supported the Democratic candidates compared to 30% who supported Republicans, and that Democrats held an approximately 20-point advantage over Republicans on which party voters trusted to handle health care.

Jackson Challenged Collins to Answer for Republican Health Care Cuts. Democratic Senate candidate Troy Jackson campaigned on universal health care and Medicare for All, while Republican Susan Collins highlighted the $50 billion Rural Health Transformation Fund. At an October debate, Jackson argued that Collins had always had access to health care and pointed to the consequences of Republican health care cuts for hospitals, birthing centers, and nursing homes. Collins touted the rural health fund and research funding in return. Jackson also pointed out that Collins could've stopped Republican cuts but instead voted to advance the bill to the floor.

Headlines

NEWSWEEK
How Will Collins, Jackson Approach Maine's Fragile Healthcare if Elected?

OUTCOME **Troy Jackson defeated Susan Collins, flipping a Republican-held seat.**

Mississippi

Mississippians Faced Serious Threats to Coverage and Access to Care. An estimated 76,694 Mississippians have already lost the Medicaid, CHIP, or ACA coverage they counted on to see

a doctor after Republicans gutted health care. Mississippi had the lowest effectuation rate in the country as only 61% of people who selected a plan kept their coverage by February, meaning two in five Mississippians who enrolled had dropped coverage. As of early November, 16 Mississippi health care providers are at-risk, announced cuts, are closing, or have closed. 110,000 Mississippians in total are anticipated to become uninsured between 2025 and 2034.

Colom Made Health Care a Central Part of His Case Against Hyde-Smith. Scott Colom repeatedly challenged Cindy Hyde-Smith over her vote for the GOP's health care cuts while supporting tax breaks for billionaires. Colom campaigned on the need to reverse Republican Medicaid cuts, restore ACA tax credits, and make health care more affordable. Colom also drew attention to the number of Mississippians who lack health insurance and criticized Hyde-Smith for touting the rural health fund while supporting legislation that would leave more people without coverage.

> *"[Cindy Hyde-Smith] voted for 400,000 to 500,000 Mississippians to not have health insurance, and she's bragging about putting a Band-Aid on a knife. When you've been stabbed, you don't need a Band-Aid; you need a doctor in a hospital."*
>
> **— SCOTT COLOM, WAPT**

Headlines

WAPT
Mississippi Senate Candidates Debate Health Care Solutions

WLOX
Democratic Senate Candidate Scott Colom Talks Tariffs, Affordability and Healthcare

OUTCOME **Scott Colom defeated Cindy Hyde-Smith, flipping a Republican-held seat and becoming the first Democrat elected to the U.S. Senate from Mississippi since 1982.**

North Carolina

North Carolinians Had a Lot at Stake in the Fight Over Health Care. An estimated 234,453 North Carolinians have already lost the Medicaid, CHIP, or ACA coverage they counted on to see a doctor after Republicans gutted health care. As of early November, 24 North Carolina health care providers are at-risk, announced cuts, are closing, or have closed. 450,000 North Carolinians in total are anticipated to become uninsured between 2025 and 2034.

Recent Polls Show Health Care To Be A Top Issue In Race For Senate. A WSOC-TV/WRAL poll found that health care was the second most important issue to North Carolina voters heading into the midterms, receiving an average importance score of 8.6 out of 10, compared with 8.8 for the economy. The poll found health care was more important to Cooper voters (8.8) than Whatley voters (8.2)

Cooper Had a Clear Advantage on Health Care. In a post-election survey from Searchlight Institute, North Carolina voters identified health care as the second most important issue after the cost of living. Democrat Roy Cooper had a clear advantage over Republican Michael Whatley on the issue, with 46% of voters identifying health care as an area where Cooper was focused versus 17% for Whatley.

OUTCOME **Roy Cooper defeated Michael Whatley by nearly 20 percentage points, flipping a Republican-held seat.**

Ohio

Ohioans Faced Major Coverage Losses and Provider Threats. An estimated 394,772 Ohioans have already lost the Medicaid, CHIP, or ACA coverage they counted on to see a doctor after Republicans gutted health care. ACA Marketplace enrollment fell by 32%, one of the steepest declines in the country. As of early November, 40 Ohio health care providers are at-risk, announced cuts, are closing, or have closed. 460,000 Ohioans in total are anticipated to become uninsured between 2025 and 2034.

Health Care Was a Top Issue for Ohio Voters. A post-election survey found that 40% of Ohio voters named health care among the three most important issues to their Senate vote, making it the second most important issue after the cost of living. Voters were also much more likely to say Democrat Sherrod Brown was focused on health care than Republican Jon Husted. 33% said Brown was focused on the issue, compared with just 19% who said the same of Husted.

Brown Put the Consequences of Republican Health Care Cuts Front and Center. Brown repeatedly challenged Husted over his vote for Republican health care cuts, including through an ad featuring an Ohio mother whose daughter relies on Medicaid. The mother described how Husted had promised her family he would not cut her daughter's coverage, only to support the legislation that put it at risk.

▶ "Audrey"

I'm Sherrod Brown and I approve this message. Our daughter Audrey has a rare neurological disease. But that doesn't stop her from dancing and going to school with friends. Without Medicaid, that wouldn't be possible. Last year, we met with Senator Jon Husted. He looked us in the eye and he said, 'I will not cut this.' One week later, he put half a million Ohioans' health care at risk, including Audrey's. You can't hug our daughter, take your picture with her, and then cut the care that she relies on. We're not gonna stand for that.

OUTCOME **Sherrod Brown defeated Jon Husted, flipping a Republican-held seat.**

South Carolina

South Carolina Saw One of the Steepest Drops in ACA Coverage in the Country. ACA marketplace enrollment fell by 29% in 2026, one of the largest declines of any state in the country. The drop in coverage came as enhanced premium tax credits expired and health insurance costs rose, leaving more South Carolinians struggling to afford coverage. An estimated 238,522 South Carolinians have already lost the Medicaid, CHIP, or ACA coverage they counted on to see a doctor after Republicans gutted health care. As of early November, 14 South Carolina health care providers are at-risk, announced cuts, are closing, or have closed. 190,000 South Carolinians in total are anticipated to become uninsured between 2025 and 2034.

Health Care and Affordability Were Front and Center for South Carolina Voters. At an October town hall with Democratic Senate candidate Annie Andrews, South Carolinians raised concerns about the cost of care and the importance of protecting Medicaid, particularly for underserved communities. One local pastor emphasized that Medicaid was essential to the communities he serves, while another voter called for making health care more affordable. Andrews said affordability was the issue she heard about most as she traveled the state.

Annie Andrews Made Health Care a Central Part of Her Campaign. A pediatrician, Andrews put health care at the center of her campaign. She launched a "Patients and Prices Tour," visiting rural hospitals and meeting with patients, veterans, health care workers, and community leaders. Her platform called for reversing Republican Medicaid cuts, expanding Medicaid in South Carolina, restoring ACA tax credits, lowering prescription drug costs, and protecting rural hospitals.

OUTCOME **Annie Andrews defeated Darline Graham, flipping a Republican-held seat for the first time since 1998.**

SECTION 08

CONCLUSION: 2026 WAS A HEALTH CARE ELECTION

The 2026 midterms sent a clear message: Republicans could not vote to gut health care, drive up costs, and put hospitals and providers at risk, then expect voters to forget about it. As families faced higher premiums, coverage losses, and growing uncertainty about whether they could get care close to home, health care became a defining issue in races across the country.

Democrats made those consequences a central part of their campaigns. They connected Republican votes to the real-world harm facing families, offered a clear contrast on lowering costs and protecting coverage, and kept health care at the center of the affordability debate. The results, polling, advertising, and campaign coverage all point to the same conclusion: voters were deeply concerned about health care, trusted Democrats more to address it, and those concerns were reflected at the ballot box. Democrats showed that standing up for affordable, accessible health care is not just good policy; it is a winning political message.

> *"Voters definitely had healthcare costs on their mind and it definitely impacted their vote choice."*
>
> **– MOLLYANN BRODIE, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, KFF AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC OPINION AND SURVEY RESEARCH PROGRAM AT A VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE**



SUPPORTERS GATHER AT PROTECT OUR CARE'S "SICK OF IT" BUS TOUR, WHICH CARRIED THE FIGHT TO FIX HEALTH CARE ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

THE RESULTS

SIX REPUBLICAN SENATE SEATS FLIPPED



Josh Turek
IOWA
def. Ashley Hinson



Troy Jackson
MAINE
def. Susan Collins



Scott Colom
MISSISSIPPI
def. Cindy Hyde-Smith



Roy Cooper
N. CAROLINA
def. Michael Whatley



Sherrod Brown
OHIO
def. Jon Husted



Annie Andrews
S. CAROLINA
def. Darline Graham

... and key House pickups where Democrats ran on health care



Randy Villegas CA-22
def. David Valadao



Cait Conley NY-17
def. Mike Lawler



Elaine Luria VA-02
def. Jen Kiggans

BY THE NUMBERS

$1 Trillion
Cut from Medicaid & the ACA under H.R. 1 to pay for tax breaks

22 Million
Americans who relied on the health care tax credits Republicans let expire

$239M
Democratic health care ad spending — more than 1.5× Republicans

4 in 10
Voters who named health care among their top three issues (KFF)

20 Points
Democratic advantage on which party voters trust on health care

6 Seats
Republican-held Senate seats flipped by Democrats

THE TAKEAWAY

STANDING UP FOR AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE ISN'T JUST GOOD POLICY — IT'S A WINNING POLITICAL MESSAGE.