PROTECT
OUR CARE

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Leslie Dach and Brad Woodhouse**,** Protect Our Care
DATE: November 02, 2026
RE: One Day Out: This Is a Health Care Election

Introduction

"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, New York Times*

Tomorrow, voters will use their ballots to say what matters most. After a year of chaos and wreckage, health care is at the top of the list.

Republicans have spent the closing weeks of their campaigns trying to run away from the health care crisis they created. Last year, they rammed through the largest health care cuts in American history, gutting Medicaid, and ripping away Affordable Care Act tax credits to fund tax breaks for billionaires and big corporations. They put nursing homes, rural hospitals, children's health care, and coverage for millions of working families on the chopping block. They sent premiums soaring and made it harder for Americans to get the care they need.

But Republicans keep trying to change the subject, pivoting to fraud as they try to turn attention away from affordability and the consequences of their own health care cuts. Voters aren't falling for it.

"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.****" — Joel White, Republican health policy advisor, New York Times*

We've been here before. In 2018, health care fueled a blue wave that flipped the House after Republicans tried to dismantle the Affordable Care Act. As Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi famously put it, "health care was on the ballot, and health care won."

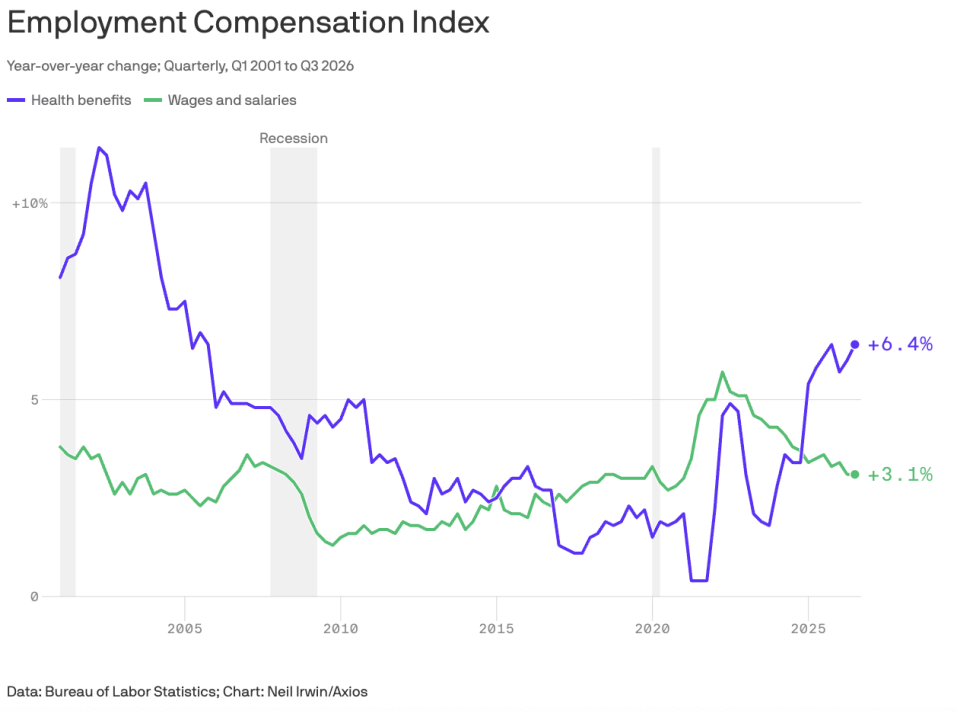
Eight years later, the stakes are even more tangible. In 2018, voters were responding to the threat of losing their health care. In 2026, they are living with the consequences of cuts Republicans passed into law. History shows what happens when health care becomes the central issue in a midterm election. The damage is showing up in kitchen-table budgets, doctors' offices, hospital emergency rooms, and communities across the country, making health

care uniquely powerful heading into November. Americans aren't just hearing about the Republican health care agenda. They are paying for it.

Republicans Created a Health Care Crisis

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.

New analysis from Axios shows that over the last year, insurance costs rose 6.4% while wages and salaries grew just 3.1%. Whether families get coverage through the marketplace, Medicaid, or work, they're paying more for health care and taking home less.



The Health Care Crisis Is Playing Out in Battleground States

Across the country, the consequences of Republican health care cuts have become a defining issue of competitive races that will determine control of Congress.

Health care is even moving longtime Trump voters. In Texas, Cindy Banda is a mother and cancer patient who voted for Trump three times, but is now voting Democratic for the first time as medical bills and rising costs reshape her priorities. In the Rio Grande Valley, Dr. Ivan Melendez voted for Trump in 2024, but now regrets it after Republican cuts have made it harder to obtain and keep health care coverage. Melendez ultimately voted for Democrat James Talarico.

Health care has also dominated local headlines about the election, documenting how hospital closures, rising costs, and Medicaid cuts are at the center of the political landscape.

- **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
- **Politico:** Health Care Shakes Up the Iowa Election
- **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 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

Together, these stories reflect a growing political problem for Republicans: voters who once backed them are turning away over their health care cuts and cost hikes. And everywhere they turn, the headlines tell the same story: Republicans are the ones making health care more expensive and harder to get. **When communities are feeling the consequences of Republican health care cuts and rising costs as voters decide who will represent them in Congress, health care takes center stage.**

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

Republicans have been hoping voters would ignore the damage the GOP caused when they took a wrecking ball to health care, but the polls tell a different story. 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. 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."**

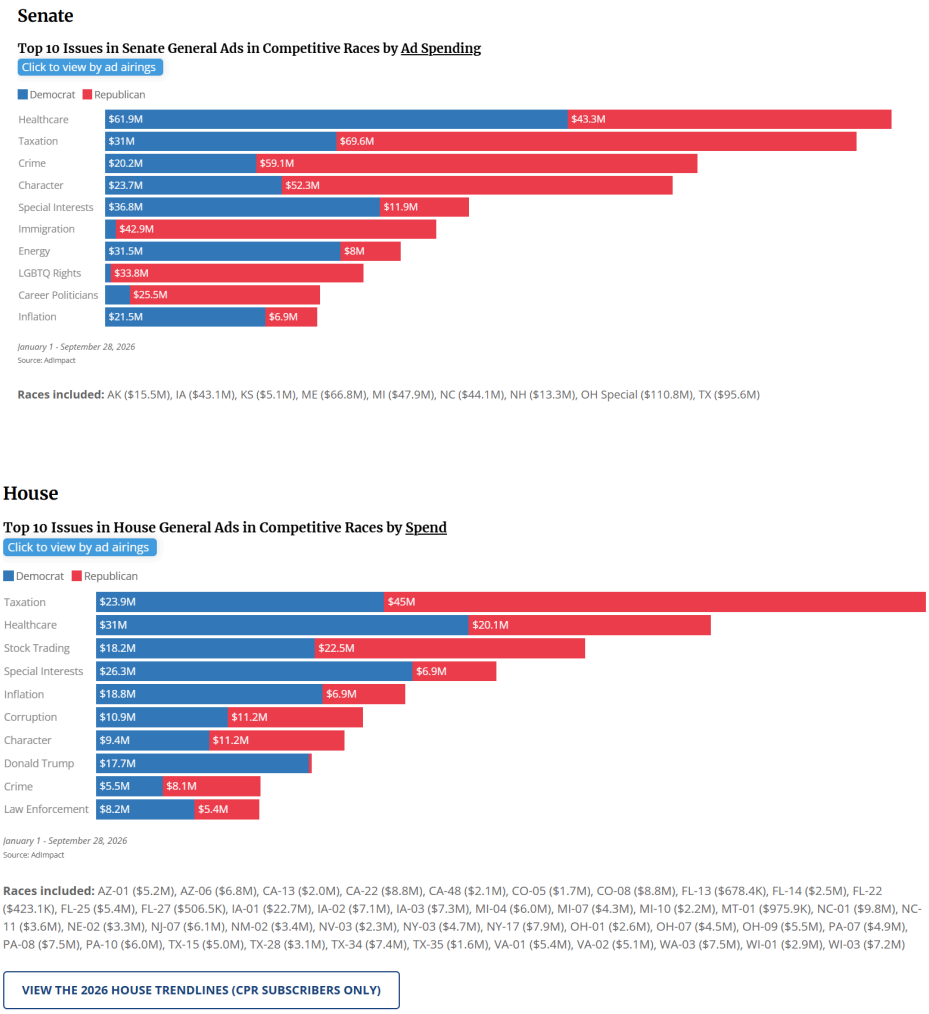
- **The New York Times:** The Trump administration's handling of health care costs has landed them 37 points underwater.
- **KFF:** Health care is tied with gasoline as a top economic worry. 62% of voters are "very" or "somewhat" worried about being able to afford health care.
- **Gallup:** 50% of voters have said health care would be "extremely important" to their vote for Congress this year.
- **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.
- **Families USA:** 47% of voters name health care costs as a top priority for Congress and the President.
- **KFF:** "Democrats hold nearly a two-to-one advantage over Republicans on whom voters trust more on the issue of health care costs." "The Democratic edge on health care costs has grown over the past six months."
    - **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."
    - **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)
    - **Quinnipiac University**: 55% of voters trust Democrats to handle health care, compared to just 31% who trust Republicans.

Democrats Are Running on Making Health Care More Affordable

Across the country, Democratic candidates are making the cost of care a central part of their campaigns and laying out what they want to do about it. They're calling for the restoration of the Affordable Care Act tax credits, reversing Republicans' Medicaid cuts that are hurting children, seniors, people with disabilities, and families, and lowering prescription drug costs.

Ad Spending

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 $239 million on health care ads — more than 1.5 times as much as Republicans on the issue.



Debates

Candidates in competitive races are being forced to answer on the debate stage for their records on Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, and rising costs.

In New York's 17th Congressional District, Republican Rep. Mike Lawler faced questions from Democratic challenger Cait Conley over his decisive vote for Medicaid cuts. Conley accused

Lawler of breaking his promise not to cut Medicaid and argued that his vote stripped health coverage from hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

In Iowa's Senate race, Democrat Josh Turek challenged Republican Rep. Ashley Hinson over her support for health care cuts, arguing she backed cuts in a state already facing a health care and cancer crisis to fund tax breaks for billionaires.

In Maine's Senate race, Democratic challenger Troy Jackson argued that the $50 billion rural health fund was a pittance compared with the Medicaid cuts Republican Sen. Susan Collins helped advance.

The Take Away

Tomorrow, voters have the chance to send a message that their health care is non-negotiable. Republicans made their choice. Now voters will make theirs.

After Election Day, the fight must continue. Democrats must work to reverse the damage, restore affordable coverage, lower costs, and protect access to care for every American. As Leader Jeffries put it: **"Democrats are fighting hard to cancel the cuts…lower the costs…and save your health care."**