From Ballots to Strategy

Turning the 2026 Midterms into a Government Affairs Plan

Chanell Autrey
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The map has been redrawn

54+

Senate seats for Democrats, counting two independents who caucus with them

237+

House seats for Democrats, a comfortable majority

Divided

A Democratic Congress and a Republican White House for 2027–28

What drove it: frustration over the cost of fuel, groceries, housing and health care, plus an unpopular war in Iran.

Source: Edelman, " 2026 U.S. Midterm Elections," Nov. 4, 2026. Results subject to final certification.

Five ways the results reach business

Oversight is a frontline risk
Health care, finance, tech, energy, minerals and defense

Affordability is the lens
Pricing and investment judged by their effect on costs

Regulatory whiplash
Executive actions and Congress pull in different directions

Funding fights
Shutdowns can delay contractors, grantees and projects

Bipartisan openings
Infrastructure, permitting, housing and domestic manufacturing

52%

of corporate affairs leaders cite government, regulation, trade and national security as significant near-term risks

Edelman, Future of Corporate Affairs research

Source: Edelman, " 2026 U.S. Midterm Elections," Nov. 4, 2026.

Four moves for the next 100 days



01 Identify champions, opponents and coalition partners



02 Build relationships with incoming members and staff



03 Adapt to new leadership and committee structures



04 Prepare for divided and unified government

Map every new member



Signals to research

- Committee and subcommittee assignments
- Campaign promises, especially on affordability
- Prior record in a state legislature or city hall
- Caucus memberships and early cosponsorships
- Who they hire as senior staff

Build coalitions beyond the usual allies

Traditional partners

Trade associations, chambers of commerce and industry peers who share your core priorities.

Unexpected allies

Labor, advocacy groups, universities and nonprofits that agree with you on a specific issue.

Local voices

Mayors, county officials, local employers and community leaders who carry weight with a member.

Durability test: would this coalition still make sense if the majority flipped again in 2028?

Your first 100 days with new offices

Nov–Dec

Transition

Orientation and staff hiring. Offer introductions, not asks.

January

Sworn in

Committee assignments and new rules. Legislatures and new governors start.

Feb–Mar

First hearings

Offer testimony and briefings. Prepare funding requests.

Spring

Show, don't tell

Host district or facility visits during recess.

Rule of thumb: the best time to become a resource is before the first bill is drafted.

Staff relationships drive results

In Washington

- Chiefs of staff and legislative directors set priorities
- Committee staff write the bills
- New offices hire fast, so meet staff as they arrive

In state capitals

- Many legislators are part-time with small staffs
- Sessions are short and move quickly
- Being a trusted, fast resource is a big advantage

Be useful first: district data, one-page explainers and a fast answer when they call.

New gavels, new rules of the road

What changes

- Chairs, and subpoena power, switch parties in both chambers
- Subcommittee jurisdictions can be redrawn
- A new rules package sets floor procedure

EXPECTED NEW CHAIRS
Sheldon Whitehouse, Senate Judiciary
Elizabeth Warren, Senate Banking
Robert Garcia, House Oversight

Your action steps

- Re-map each issue to its new committee and subcommittee
- Refresh briefings for new chairs and ranking members
- Tie your asks to the new majority's priorities
- Keep investing in the minority: today's ranking member is tomorrow's chair

Source: Edelman, "2026 U.S. Midterm Elections," Nov. 4, 2026. Chair selections are not final until party votes in Nov.–Dec.

Prepare for more oversight

68%

of corporate affairs leaders had a reputational issue with immediate business impact in the past year.

Most exposed sectors: health care, financial services, tech and AI, energy, critical minerals and defense contracting.

Readiness checklist

- Audit your exposure to agency actions likely to draw scrutiny
- Prepare for document requests and executive testimony
- Expect activist pressure on climate, DEI and public commitments
- Align government affairs, legal and communications teams
- Brief leadership before the first hearing notice arrives

Source: Edelman, " 2026 U.S. Midterm Elections," Nov. 4, 2026. 68% figure: Edelman, Future of Corporate Affairs research.

Divided vs. unified government

Divided government

Washington, 2027–28

OPPORTUNITIES

- Deals on infrastructure, permitting, housing and domestic manufacturing
- Must-pass bills like appropriations and the NDAA carry riders

RISKS

- Veto threats, shutdowns and funding delays
- More executive orders and rulemaking

Unified government

One-party trifecta states

OPPORTUNITIES

- Fast-moving agendas you can help shape
- Room for bold state policy pilots

RISKS

- Rapid policy swings with fewer checks
- Less leverage if you're aligned with the minority

Divided-government column draws on Edelman, "2026 U.S. Midterm Elections," Nov. 4, 2026.

What to watch through 2028

NOW

Nov–Dec 2026

- Leadership and committee chair picks
- Lame-duck funding and defense bills
- White House speeds up executive actions and nominees

NEXT

Jan–Mar 2027

- New oversight agenda launches
- Proposals on affordability, health care, taxes and consumer protection
- Early budget clashes

LATER

2027–28

- Sustained investigations
- The 2028 presidential race narrows room for bipartisan deals

Source: Edelman, " 2026 U.S. Midterm Elections," Nov. 4, 2026.

Statehouses Shifted Too

6

Governor's offices flipped to Democrats: Alaska, Georgia, Iowa, Nevada, Ohio and Texas

29–20

Democratic vs. Republican governors in 2027, with Kansas still uncalled

7

States changed legislative control; Democrats will lead 23 legislatures, Republicans 22

Examples: Wisconsin and Pennsylvania gain Democratic trifectas; Iowa moves to divided government.

Sources: MultiState and NCSL, Nov. 4, 2026; Fox News (Iowa). Unofficial; Kansas governor and AK, AZ, GA legislatures uncalled.

What the state shifts mean for you

New governors, new agendas

Transition teams and first budgets take shape this winter. Get in early.

New majorities, new chairs

Flipped chambers bring new leaders and committee chairs in January.

Broken trifectas mean bargaining

Divided states like Iowa will see more negotiation and more vetoes.

A growing patchwork

Expect more state action on data centers, food and packaging rules while Washington is gridlocked.

Patchwork examples: Edelman, " 2026 U.S. Midterm Elections," Nov. 4, 2026. Other points are presenter analysis.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Your post-midterm action plan

1

Re-map

Update champion and opponent maps for every chamber and capital

By December

2

Introduce

Meet incoming members and senior staff before session starts

Dec–Jan

3

Re-align

Frame asks around affordability and new committee priorities

Jan–Feb

4

Stress-test

Model scenarios for gridlock, oversight and state swings

Ongoing

Election night isn’t the finish line. It’s the starting gun.

Questions and discussion

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