



Winter of Discontent: A Texas-Sized Storm Brewing for the 2026 Midterms

Jonathan Bridges

For those of us from the East Coast to the Midwest, it's been a blistering winter. While a groundhog's shadow may foretell six more weeks of cold, the recent results of a Texas Senate race last week predict a much longer winter for Republicans.

The results of the special election in Texas Senate District 9 aren't just a [local headline](#); they are an alarm for every Republican candidate from Florida to California. In a district that President Trump carried by 17 points in 2024, a Democratic union leader, [Taylor Rehmet](#), didn't just clinch the seat—he dominated with 57.2% of the vote.

A 31-Point Swing Should Terrify Republicans

The math in SD-9 is brutal. Republicans went from a 17-point victory in 2024 to a 14-point loss in January 2026. That is a 31-point swing in just over a year.

If the Left can flip a deep-red stronghold in the heart of Tarrant County, then every likely-Republican and "swing" seat in Congress is on the table. The Democrats aren't just coming for the swing districts; they are coming for the base.

The GOP outspent the Democrats in this race by nearly 10-to-1. Leigh Wambsganss had the backing of the White House, the Lieutenant Governor, and the RNC. Wambsganss had the money, the ads, and the infrastructure to pull off a win, reporting a staggering \$736,000 in expenditures compared to Rehmet's roughly \$70,000.

The Moderate Smokescreen

But money doesn't vote. What Rehmet did was take a page from the Roy Cooper and Abigail Spanberger model—positioning himself as a pragmatic leader while masking a radical liberal agenda. He had a platform focused on traditional Conservative kitchen-table issues like affordability and the economy. If you didn't see "union president" splashed on his website, you may even think he was a Republican. Like Rehmet, Democrats are masquerading as moderates, appealing to unaffiliated voters. Republicans need to remind voters that there are no more moderate Democrats running for office; there are only radical wolves in sheep's clothing.

This moderate, kitchen table strategy is particularly effective in SD-9. Take a look at the makeup of [Texas SD-9](#): White (non-Hispanic) 43%, Hispanic 35%, Black 14%, and Asian 7.5%.

It wasn't turnout alone that caused the shift. Republicans had a 51% turnout to Democrats 35%. Almost all Independents though voted Democrat. The Left is successfully peeling away margins in these growing suburban communities. We can no longer rely on "base turnout" alone when the base itself is being redefined by demographic shifts. Why the shift? Among the reasons were optics. SD-9 is made up of working class and middle class voters. Aside from his union background, Rehmet looked like a Trump, populist candidate. He campaigned on affordability, the economy, and jobs. The Republican candidate, Wambsganss, was from an affluent area and focused on a broader platform, social issues, and seemed out of touch with the voters. This was a great textbook reason why it's important for candidates to fit the background of the electorate.

What Does This Mean Nationally?

The national effects of this loss cannot be overstated. Republicans have a House majority by one seat, with Republicans holding only 218 seats to the Democrats' 214. While 80% of districts are functionally "safe," the battleground is shrinking to approximately 42 true toss-up races. Losing the Republican majority in Congress would bring the Trump train to a screeching halt.

The loss of even a few seats in November would:

- **Kill the President's Agenda:** Tax cuts, border security, and deregulation will vanish.
- **Launch Endless Investigations:** A Democrat-led House and Senate will spend the next two years on subpoenas and impeachments instead of solutions.
- **Stall Confirmations:** Last year Senate Democrats and a few Republicans pushed to stall almost 200 Trump appointees. If majorities flip, judicial and other appointments will continue to be stalled.

The Senate map is mathematically favorable to Republicans (defending 20 seats vs. 13 for Democrats), but "safety" is an illusion. The "Big Four" to watch are Maine, Michigan, Georgia, and North Carolina. With high-profile retirements—like Thom Tillis in NC and Gary Peters in MI—and shifting demographics, the GOP will need to lean heavily into high-integrity donor acquisition. We are moving toward a cycle where off-year giving will reach presidential-year levels. Republicans will need every bit to combat the Soros funded narratives from the left.

Republicans Must Wake Up

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick called this a "wake-up call," for Republicans. The Democrats are already using this victory and Gov. Spanberger's victory in Virginia as proof that kitchen table issues work. They see blood in the water and are using our own playbook against us.

What can we do to ensure Republican victories in 2026 and beyond?

1. **Better candidates.** While too late this cycle, we need to recruit candidates that represent the make up of the districts they serve. We need true representatives of the people, not DC special interests. However, we need grassroots candidates that understand all aspects of running for office and are properly vetted. Candidates need to focus on kitchen table issues that affect the lives of voters, not culture wars.
2. **Invest in data.** Republicans need to invest in their data, their mail, and their donor relationships now. Campaigns need to know who their voters are, what motivates them, and target them with relevant messaging not generic blanket platitudes. Spring and summer need to be focused on fundraising both high dollar donors and smaller grassroots donors.
3. **Combat the Democrats "Moderate" narrative.** The Democrats have proven that a motivated ground game and a "moderate" facade can overcome a 10-to-1 spending disadvantage. This will push more independents to vote Democrat.
4. **Get out and vote.** Too many Republicans will either stay at home because Trump isn't on the ballot or because they don't like the Republican candidate. Either reason is bad. As mentioned above, Democrats are making a case that their moderate voice is better than Republicans. The message is to appeal to independent voters and disgruntled Republicans. If Republicans need a reminder of why this is flawed, then look no further to Governor Spanberger's election in Virginia. Within her first month, she has undone a stack of Younkin policies and already has new voting maps that give Democrats a 10-1 majority in Congress.

We have ten months until the midterms. We cannot afford to sleep at the wheel. We cannot assume that Trump's 2024 coattails will carry us through 2026. If we take anything for granted we will lose Congress and the White House. If we don't turn out, we are in for a very long winter.

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