

GOP polling surprise

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, joined by National Republican Senatorial Committee chair Tim Scott, speaks to reporters at the Capitol in March. Photo: Kevin Dietsch / Getty Images

President Trump's top political hands had some surprising advice for Senate Republicans last week: Talk more about health care.

Why it matters: Trump and the MAGA base are fixated on the voter-ID and proof-of-citizenship SAVE Act. But Republican message testing from Trump's own pollster suggests candidates are better off focusing elsewhere.

 **Driving the news:** Top Trumpworld campaign officials, including James Blair, pollster Tony Fabrizio and Senate Leadership Fund executive director Alex Latcham, briefed senators and aides Aug. 5 on the midterms.

- **! They presented polling** on the party's strongest potential campaign messages, according to slides we viewed.
- **One of the strongest:** going after health insurance companies.

Republicans had a 46-point advantage when calling for greater transparency around insurers' profits, claim denials and wait times for patient care while hitting Democrats for "lining insurers' pockets."

- **Banning congressional stock trading** and cracking down on fraud also emerged as potentially powerful issues, with 44- and 38-point advantages for Republicans, respectively.

 **The intrigue:** Messaging on the SAVE Act had far less upside, giving Republicans just a 14-point advantage over Democratic messaging on the issue, according to the results shared in the meeting.

- **"Voters prefer a Republican** who supports the SAVE America Act by double digits over a Democrat who opposes it. We have a litany of policies that deliver for Americans and will put us over the top in November," a source familiar with the presentation said.

Between the lines: Health care has long been a weakness for Republicans. The decision to let enhanced Obamacare tax credits expire last year was broadly unpopular.

- 🗣️ **Now, Republicans see an opening** to go on offense by making insurance companies the enemy.

👂 **What we're hearing:** Blair said to expect MAGA Inc. and Republican National Committee money to start flowing into midterm races soon, though he did not specify when or where, according to two sources familiar with what was said.

- **National Republican Senatorial Committee** chair Tim Scott (R-S.C.) echoed the message. "Good news coming our way is what they basically indicated," he told us in a brief interview after the meeting.
- 😟 **Anxiety has grown** in GOP campaign circles over when, where and whether Trump will unleash the more than \$400 million sitting in MAGA Inc. to boost Republicans in the midterms.

"**I control it,**" Trump told Punchbowl News when asked about the super PAC. "I could spend it on pretty much anything I want."

- **But he added,** "I'm going to help Republicans."

👁️ **What to watch:** The RNC coming online in the midterms would be a major boost.

- **The committee has \$128 million** in cash on hand. By comparison, the Democratic National Committee has \$16 million, plus \$18 million in debt.
- 🏛️ **A recent Supreme Court ruling** also allows the RNC to spend unlimited amounts in coordination with candidates, meaning the money can stretch further through lower TV ad rates unavailable to super PACs such as MAGA Inc.