

Does Trump Care About the 2026 Midterms? They Care About Him

di Jason L. Riley

Will the 2020 election ever be over? Not so long as [Donald Trump](#) lives and breathes, apparently.

Mr. Trump wants the media to embrace the fiction that he beat Joe Biden “in a landslide” 5½ years ago. “The election was rigged. It was a dirty election,” he said for the 7,000th time in an interview with NBC News on Sunday. Anyone who disagrees is “crooked” or “stupid,” he added with typical restraint.

The president was defending his proposal for a \$1.8 billion slush fund to pay off MAGA friends and allies who believe they’ve been wronged by the government. “I think the weaponization fund is a great idea,” Mr. Trump said. It could mean having taxpayers compensate the Jan. 6 ruffians who attacked law enforcement, smashed their way inside the Capitol, and defiled its corridors with urine and excrement. Polling shows that most Americans view the rioters as violent criminals who tried to overturn the results of a lawful election, yet the president repeatedly refers to them as “heroes” and “patriots.”

Every Republican in Washington not named [Donald Trump](#) understands that the president’s overriding political priority between now and the midterm elections should be protecting the GOP majority. If Democrats take control of the House or Senate next year, Mr. Trump’s presidency is kaput. He will spend his final two years fending off corruption investigations and impeachment efforts.

Rep. Robert Garcia of California, who would chair the House Oversight Committee in a Democratic majority, told MS NOW last week that Democrats are “already preparing and gearing up” for a successful November. “We’ve got a team on Epstein, we have a team on [Trump] family corruption, we have a team on DHS and ICE,” Mr. Garcia

said, referring to the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, two favorite targets of the left. “Those teams are actively working on preparation, letters, research.” Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, who is expected to head the House Judiciary Committee if the Democratic Party retakes the chamber and attendant subpoena powers, said he envisions every committee in Congress playing a role in investigating the White House. The Trump administration’s misdeeds permeate “almost every aspect of the government,” Mr. Raskin said, which obliges “all of the committees to ferret out the corruption within their field.”

Such prospects may not worry Mr. Trump, who consistently puts himself before the party and believes that personal allegiance is more important than sustaining a GOP majority. Most presidents understand that politics is about addition and that sometimes internal divisions must be indulged to ensure a bigger tent. Yet Mr. Trump has worked to defeat Republican senators who sometimes crossed him (Bill Cassidy of Louisiana) or weren’t loyal enough (John Cornyn of Texas). A majority coalition of center-right Republicans doesn’t much interest the president. Far more appealing to Mr. Trump is total control of a rump GOP minority that will advance his retribution agenda.

The MAGA purity tests that the president has been invoking might make more sense if he were more popular and the GOP majorities in Congress were wider. But Republicans barely control the House and Senate, and a recent Fox News poll found that 70% of adults disapprove of current economic conditions. According to Fox, Mr. Trump’s job-approval rating now rests at 33%, which is 12 points lower than it was when Republicans lost 40 seats and control of the House in the 2018 midterms.

Even if the president weren’t obsessed with payback, Republicans would face an uphill climb in the fall. The party of the president historically loses seats in midterm elections because they’re a referendum on his performance. Mr. Trump was elected to tackle inflation, but prices continue to outpace wages. A new Federal Reserve Bank of New York survey found that nearly half of Americans (48%) say they are worse off financially today than they were a year ago, the highest share since 2023.

The Iran war may be unpopular, but Mr. Trump could spend more time explaining to voters why preventing the ayatollahs from obtaining a nuclear weapon and spreading terrorism through proxies like Hezbollah is in the interests of the U.S. and our allies.

But that would require him to spend less time talking about ballrooms, celebratory arches, slapping his mug on a \$250 bill, and picking fights with journalists who state plain facts about the 2020 election results.

Perhaps the president is convinced that this year's election will be less about substance and more about mobilizing the base with over-the-top populism. But undermining faith in the electoral process is an odd way to turn out grassroots voters. Nonstop talk about "rigged" elections may result in Republican voters deciding to stay home.