Cooper: Hello, and welcome back to the Extempore podcast hosted by Truman State Forensics. I'm your co-host, Cooper Spacil…

Jack: …and I'm Jack Unsell…

Cooper: And today we'll be talking about the midterm elections. We'll be ideally trying to give a little preview of just kind of all the facets of all the races we're seeing today. Um, so with that being said, I guess we can just kind of jump into it

Jack: Let's do it!

Cooper: Um, Is there any races that you're in particularly interested in talking about?

Jack: Well, one that sticks out to me the most is the Senate race in Michigan.

Cooper: Okay.

Jack: Primarily because it's kind of been the focal point of this growing, emerging populist DSA left-wing movement with Abdul El-Sayed. Um, It's been one of the most entertaining and one of the most interesting races so out of all of them that's the one that sticks out to me the most. What are your thoughts on it?

Cooper: Yeah no I think it's super interesting for sure. I still remember watching the primaries between Haley Stevens and Abdul El-Sayed back in August and I think that's what really drew a lot of media attention to the race for sure. But I'm glad to see it's really moved into a, um, focus on Abdul El-Sayed and the Republican challenger, uh, Mike Rogers.

Jack: Yeah speaking of that another thing about Michigan that I don't know if it's not present in other states but we especially see the kind of coalition that Democrats were aiming for a period there. There were periods like I know during Mamdani's campaign where there was strong divisions between the candidates and that remains to this day in New York City. But when you look at Michigan Haley Stevens is out there campaigning for Abdul El-Sayed. There's a sense of community and coordination amongst the Democratic Party that is I think is also interesting in Michigan.

Cooper: Absolutely, um, and I think that's you know you've also got another former primary challenger who did make it to the final primary uh, ballot, Mallory McMorrow who's also out campaigning. So I think it's when we're looking at the Senate you know the Republicans have 53 seats right now. Democrats in their coalition of two independents have 47. Um, If we're looking at seeing a Democratic majority emerge, um, something I think is definitely possible but, you know, at least it was beginning to look slightly improbable. I think that's definitely something

you have to see is, uh, a coalition forming and not any fractionalism and I think that's the biggest part and especially Michigan.

Jack: Yeah, that actually highlights the last thing I want to point out about the Michigan race is the importance for Democrats in Michigan because unlike many of the other seats that we're going to talk about places like Kansas, Texas, Alaska; um, Michigan has a Democratic incumbent. So this isn't a seat to pick up it's a seat to lose for them. So another important thing about the dynamics of the Michigan Senate race.

Cooper: Absolutely yeah, um especially Michigan being one of those you know signature swing states. So it's you know I think if Democrats can pull off a win, uh, here which I think is very possible, um, that's the polling shows as well that I think it's one of the ones to really keep an eye on this election cycle, uh, just overall. But kind of on that topic of seats that Democrats would want to keep going into the midterms I think Georgia is the next logical one to look at especially looking at John Ossoff and his Republican challenger. I think, uh, Georgia in the past election cycles has kind of been really interesting. I mean it used to be a really heavily Republican-led state but we saw John Ossoff win his election in 2020 too. Now we're seeing him run again, um, and so I think it's really important going forward and looking at Georgia kind of as a swing state as well is, like, although on the presidential level it seems to be voting Republican but Senate level it's still kind of Democratic, right?

Jack: Yeah I think that is in large part to John Ossoff because that's something unique about Georgia is they have a Republican governor and also have had a tendency to have more Republicans than not in their houses and their state legislatures. Georgia is a southern state but John Ossoff has the appeal to be a successful Democrat. He's able to rally the support of black voters in cities like Atlanta and also still be able to have that rural outreach. So I think, specifically in Georgia, it displays the strength of candidates on both sides because both sides, um, have candidates who are in-depth, politically experienced, but especially in Georgia John Ossoff I think displays some of the key pillars of the Democratic policy.

Cooper: Very much, I think that's why you see some people coming out and saying that he could run for president. I'd like to see him in the Senate for a little bit longer should he make it to the Senate but, um, I think it's really indicative of the Democratic party right now, um, that we're seeing a lot of strong candidates kind of emerging out of what I would say was probably a weakened party following the 2024 election loss.

Jack: Yeah on that note what are your thoughts on John Ossoff flat-out denying that he's going to run for president? Do you think he's going to hold true for that? Because if you do look on poly market at least a couple of weeks ago, he was the second-highest-rated in terms of potential Democratic presidential candidates.

Cooper: I mean I think if we're looking in terms of Democratic, uh, candidates for president I think John Ossoff is obviously a popular one. I think him saying that he's not going to run, uh, I

mean it could be truthful could be not. The biggest thing with the midterms right now is that the second the midterms are over, everything is going to start for the presidential election in two years. So I think I would take his words now with a bit of a grain of salt, um, because you never know what might change in the next year. So in terms of like what Republicans could be doing after the midterms as well in the same vein I think it's a lot of what you're saying as well. Republicans across kind of the country are trying to figure out who's going to go on and replace Trump, and I think following these midterms is really where you're going to see the development of who's the party successor on both sides here.

Jack: Yeah, that actually reminds me of something not to change the subject too fast, but Republican policy and Trump's new campaigns in states where he hasn't been before. Something brings to mind is his recent rally in Wichita, Kansas I believe,

Cooper: –yes i believe in Wichita–

Jack: –Somewhere in Kansas, representing how some of these states who we didn't think were contentious at first are very much in the running. So, before we get into this discussion, do we think that Donald Trump is more of a help to the Republican Party like he has been historically, or is the unpopular administration making his active campaigning maybe a shot in the foot for the Republican Party?

Cooper: I think that really depends. Uh, I think a lot of how people are talking about this election is are we going to see a blue wave here and some of the other analysis I've seen, some done by the Cook Political Report, for instance, is describing it a little bit more as a red undertow. Is it Democrats are really out and supportive and they're going to– are they going to see any successes due to enthusiasm for left-wing politics or is it more so a demotivation of conservative politics? And I really think that's going to be the critical defining issue especially when we're looking at all the states is: Who's actually showing up to the polls? Are Republicans going to feel motivated? I mean Donald Trump is at a record-low favorability in a lot of places, not everywhere, but on the whole, and so what does that do to Republican voters? What does that do to independent voters? Um, So I think that's really going to be the deciding factor ultimately, um is whether Republican voters show up to the polls less so than I think Democratic voters show up to the polls.

Jack: Yeah I think Kansas specifically is a really good litmus test for that because we see obviously nationwide disapproval of the Republican Party in the Trump administration, but unlike some of the places we've talked about, like Georgia and Michigan, there's not an overly enthusiastic progressive, big flashy, Democratic candidate. In fact, Adam Hamilton is a mega church pastor who didn't even know what party he was going to run for, so do you think that “moderacy” will help in the fact of creating a coalition within Kansas, or will it hurt from not tapping into that DSA progressive enthusiasm?

Cooper: Well I think it's really indicative of Kansas as a state overall because Kansas I think it often gets the label of being a deep red state, um, because of how it votes in presidential elections but I think when we're looking at state politics in Kansas overall I think Kansas is kind of astonishingly purple, um in that way. Like you said, I don't think you see a whole lot of progressivism out of the state of Kansas, but when we're looking at the Senate race between Adam Hamilton, the Democrat, and Roger Marshall, the Republican, I think what you're seeing is uh these candidates are fairly moderate on both sides. You know, Roger Marshall is not an extreme Republican. Adam Hamilton is not an extreme Democrat, so I think when we're looking at how Kansas votes in this way, I think a lot of it is really going to depend upon what exactly are these candidates doing to meet the needs of Kansans? You know with the Iran war specifically in its impacts on fertilizer, I mean, Kansas is a very agrarian economy a lot of farmers there, so it's going to depend upon how do those farmers decide to vote. Is it voting for a Democrat who while he is, you know, a Methodist mega pastor, so someone they you know agree with on some social policies do they believe in his economic policies and the same with Roger Marshall: is what he represents in a current sitting Senate member, um, and the party who you know Kansans have voted with for a large majority of the time, is he going to represent someone that can bring better changes to the kind of the hardships they're facing right now? I think that's ultimately what it boils down to.

Jack: Yeah I think it's also important to highlight the fact that Kansas is not alone in this journey of like agrarian, farmer, rural races becoming closer because although I don't know if we'll talk about it very much there's also been talk about races closing in terms of competitiveness in Iowa and Nebraska and potentially you can even shoehorn Texas into that category which we'll talk about later so I think it's also important to recognize that this shift is not something only seen in Kansas we're seeing it with like Rob Sand in Iowa and some other people across the country as well.

Cooper: And it's I something I meant to mention I think it's really interesting in this way when we're kind of looking at the electorates in those states I want to highlight like Kansas and Iowa in particular. When we're looking back on it in 2016 those are states that didn't vote for Donald Trump in the Republican primary in 2016 so when you were looking at, um, like, traditional Republican voters versus maybe MAGA Republicans, I think part of the reason why they might be running away from Republican Party right now is because they might not have been so staunchly supportive of Donald Trump to begin with and so when we're looking at how they're supporting the Republican Party right now I think that's a really I don't know if it's significant but I think it's important to at least reference that not all Republicans are made the same and I feel like there's a lot of talk about Republicans being one you know in one particular ideological camp but I think there's there's a bit more diversity than polls or races have seen in the past, I think that's we might be seeing a reemergence of that a little bit.

Jack: Yeah in that vein last thing about Kansas I know we've been talking about it for a minute, but why do you think there is such a disparity between their Senate races and their governor races? Because in the polls it seems like Hamilton and Marshall are virtually tied but when you

look to governorship Ty Masterson (R) is leading Cindy Holscher (D) by a by a stable amount so do you think it is that federal government politics that is the source of that disparity there?

Cooper: I think it could be, I mean, uh, you know I'm not an expert myself but I think just when we're looking at it on the whole I mean the governorship in Kansas kind of flip-flops every other year usually someone will get into office whether like in the past it was Republican Sam Brownback who led for two terms and then it's currently Laura Kelly whose only term limited, is the only reason why she's not running so I think it's– I think in terms of statewide elections I think I don't know if Kansas has it down to an ex-explicit method but I think there's very clear showings that statewide it's really kind of up to interpretation every single election year there's no broader, uh, logistics as to how they-uh-they vote party-wise.

Jack: Yeah that's interesting, and on the subject of catalyzing these rural voices and rural voters let's shift over to Texas and maybe one of the most exciting races between Republican Ken Paxton and James Talarico the Democratic candidate. What are your thoughts there? Why is it so close? Is Blexus finally going to happen?

Cooper: Is that what they call it? Blexus? I like that. I'm not sure I mean I think Texas is a very interesting state I always think back to Beto O'Rourke when he was running for Senate against Ted Cruz you know he came a couple points short, and everybody thought that was going to be a blue Texas I think this year there's a chance for it. I think polling shows that, but I think the important thing to note about polling is just the margins of error. I mean, some polls have George Ta– What's his name?

Jack: –*James* Talarico–

Cooper: –James, that's his name. James Talarico up by a point or two or if not tied but that's always with a margin of error of three to four percent so that means he could be five points ahead or he could be three points behind you know I think it's always really going to come down to election day what exactly is going to happen, but what are your thoughts on kind of Texas as a whole?

Jack: Yeah kind of in that same vein bringing up Beto O'Rourke I think is important here, because when you just look at it based on the numbers that race was more expensive than this race is–is right now and is going to be–there was more spending on both sides which I think is something to keep into consideration I'm not sure whether that's going to be more beneficial or negative for a specific party my initial thought is that any diversion of resources for the Republican party is going to be dangerous because they have to cover so many different tracks but regardless is this is a much different race than, um, the race between Beto O'Rourke and Ted Cruz which is, uh, the cause for I think some logical gaps between some certain arguments. So, beliefs about registration between Democrats and Republicans, a lot of assumptions are drawn from the previous election cycle. I just think the most important thing to understand about this election is how different it is. James Talarico is a much different candidate than Beto

O'Rourke in much the same way Ken Paxton is a much different candidate than Ted Cruz neither are elected neither had a ton of name recognition before the election although Paxton was Attorney General for Texas–

Cooper: –still is I believe–

Jack: –yeah, but regardless, with Texas, I think there's been a lot of inflammatory rhetoric on both sides and like you said, I think it's important to just make sure you show up on election day because that's when the results actually happen.

Cooper: Right, right. And especially in Texas I think on the side of the Republicans given Ken Paxton, I think it was relatively controversial that he won the primary over sitting Senator John Cornyn, so I think that's also going to come into play again when we're thinking about who's actually showing up on the election day is it going to be Republican voters and how many of them are actually going to show up I think that's again going to be especially the most deciding factor in Texas

Jack: yeah, especially considering Cornyn's animosity towards Paxton because although he said he will vote for Paxton and supports him and there's been a very clear antagonistic relationship between the two that paired with some of Ken's Paxton's controversies like getting impeached by the Texas state house do you think this antagonistic relationship and the beef between these two candidates is going to be the source for any controversy and furthermore is the controversy of Ted Cruz substantially different than Ken Paxton

Cooper: I think I mean to bring it back I think if John Cornyn were running in this race as the Republican nominee I think it would be a very different, um, potential outcome but I think because of Ken Paxton and kind of the objective baggage that's around him, surrounding like things such as an impeachment, I think those things really make the race closer overall. So, I think especially when we're evaluating it you're right this is not apples to apples with Beto O'Rourke and Ted Cruz this is Ken Paxton and James Talarico so evaluating on that sense especially in this national environment where Republicans seem fairly demotivated, um, due to Donald Trump's unfavorability I think that is really going to be, kind of, a perfect storm in a sense that could push James Talarico over the edge or you know Ken Paxton could very much still win this, um, and I think that's something that we shouldn't discount, is how strong Republicans still do vote and still are motivated for their party it's just specific factors might throw them away.

Jack: yeah speaking of that in Alaska it has been read for a while they have more registered Republicans than they do register Democrats: how do Democrats have a shot this year?

Cooper: So I think Mary Peltola being the Democratic nominee I think is really important because she was the statewide representative for the House of Representatives just a couple years ago. So I think having her as the nominee, someone who has won in Alaska with their representative in the House being only one, I think it's really important that she can win an

election that encompasses the entirety of the state, and especially due to the ranked-choice voting I think it's going to present some unique challenges for Republicans in the state

Jack: Absolutely, I think that state is so interesting, especially like you said, Peltola being able to create this new sort of campaign that we haven't really seen in Alaska's Senate. Um, Alaska has been one of the reddest states in the Senate for–for a while there hasn't been a a real candidate but much like we're seeing in Kansas the offering of a more centrist, moderate Democrat is successful in these states, so kind of looking at it from a broader sense to what extent do you think the Democratic Party should continue focusing on this moderacy versus enticing the younger political actors because I think obviously both are working in different circumstances and there is that big divide within the Democratic Party

Cooper: I mean, I think it's really indicative of just kind of national party mobilization. I feel, uh, Republicans have just over the past several years following 2016 done probably a better job of actually raising up some statewide, um, political bases in ways that I don't think Democrats maybe have; that's why I think you're seeing a whole lot more competitiveness from, um, Republicans in more state-based legislatures and statewide races, um, and I think Democrats are kind of starting to move in that direction and I think doing a more state-based mobilization, um, in states that you know might have been thought to not have a chance because they're so deep red like Alaska in particular, I think the mobilization of funds towards those types of campaigns will over the long-term, be beneficial. What I'm interested to see is how soon we–how *Democrats– can reap the benefits of that because of how contentious things are right now, but…

Jack: That's interesting. One last place I want to look at in terms of strong established Republican influence you've got to look at Susan Collins in Maine and the Maine Senate election so what are your thoughts there?

Cooper: I think Susan Collins is a fantastic Republican challenger I mean the way that she normally plays in the Senate being a moderate I think I mean it's successful regardless of how you feel about it personally I think, um, her method of and kind of engendering herself as a more moderate– someone who's not full-um–fully on Donald Trump's side all of the time– in terms of policies I think makes her a really challenging candidate to run up against but obviously I think there's a little bit more nuance on the Democratic side in terms of actual candidates running you want to elaborate a little bit more on that?

Jack: Yeah Maine is also so unique here because of the circumstances of their primary election the base was very excited following Graham Platner's win of the primary who was their old candidate he was progressive, DSA endorsed, one of those exciting progressives that we were talking about, um, following his sexual assault scandal and his, um, withdrawal from the race we saw Troy Jackson rise who is more centrist, more establishment; I mean it kind of shows the dichotomy of the two different sides of candidates that we're seeing so Maine in particular I think is going to, um, show us two very important things: first, does incumbency

benefit or harm Republicans right now, especially with people with name recognition like Susan Collins? And second, does that distinction between progressive excitement and centrist moderacy exist? Is there even a distinction there? Are we going to see Troy Jackson overperform? underperform? And the same thing for Susan Collins.

Cooper: Right so I think those are some important lessons to take from from that race and looking at it historically I think Susan Collins in that way is also very unique she has a very strong history of over-performing which he says in the polls so I think looking at it now, again in a national environment where Democrats are favored roughly seven or so points on a generic ballot, I think it's really interesting to then look at more specific cases like Susan Collins and Troy Jackson to see is that just generic advantage or supposed generic advantage actually going to hold true in kind of the areas where it's needed most I mean for at least Democrats because again when we're looking at it in terms of Senate control Republicans can afford to lose three races for Democrats to take the Senate they need to win practically every single one this cycle so when we're really looking at it in terms of the stakes of control of Congress I think really seeing how the national environment influences these state-uh, state-based races like in Maine and seeing how all the polling comes to actual fruition on this I think is the most important. But something I also want to talk about is this kind of debates that we've seen I know Troy Jackson and Susan Collins had a debate; Mary Paltola and Dan Sullivan in Alaska also had a debate; do you think that these debates or even the lack thereof would be indicative of how candidates are performing kind of nationally?

Jack: yeah I think debates do a couple of important things in my mind first is it really displays the candidates we're working with and the policies they're supporting, this was especially seen in I think the debate in Georgia. John Ossoff did a very specific job, uh, of just highlighting the personal flaws within his opponent and highlighting the personal differences between the two party platforms. That being said, we historically know that debates don't really have a huge impact on electoral outcomes obviously this year is different in a numerous amount of ways so we don't totally know, but I think the debates do show the difference of candidates and their platforms; and then circling back to Maine we can see in specific Susan Collins' poorer performance comparative to Troy Jackson may already being reflected in the polls, so again we don't fully know the impact of debates in particular but we can draw a couple very important things from them.

Cooper: now just there's last two states for the senate I think we should at least touch on those being Iowa and North Carolina do you have any specific thoughts on either Iowa or North Carolina and just as we figure out which ones we want to talk to last?

Jack: a couple things and then one more state I think we should add I think we need to discuss Ohio's–

Cooper: –Oh of course–

Jack: –both in their and their gubernatorial race. But before we get there Iowa's Senate I honestly haven't heard a ton about it's one pretty similar to Kansas in the sense that we see moderate Democrats performing well comparative to the unpopular Republican Party, um, and I don't know a ton about Turek is it?

Cooper: –yes**,** Josh Turek running–

Jack: –yes, I'm not sure a ton about his platform and his strategy but looking at the polls the the races are narrowing which I think is important and I'll let you say something before we move on to North Carolina

Cooper: yeah no I think I was another one to look at again it's a very strong corollary to Kansas although I would say in terms of its relevance in terms of the national media I think obviously Iowa popped up first but when we're looking at it and comparing it as another like agrarian based state I think the gubernatorial race is I think favored pretty heavily to go Democratic; of course nothing set in stone, but I think with that environment especially in Iowa I think that leads a very strong case for Josh Turek as the Democrat to overcome his opponent and just kind of seal the deal on another state that was thought to be deep red but might not actually be in actuality

Jack: yeah and conversely looking at North Carolina we see not the opposite happening, in the sense that we don't see Republicans winning but we are seeing a race that is getting less and less close as the days go on. Roy Cooper the former governor of North Carolina is just having a field day there, he's been projected to win ever since he announced his candidacy and his lead has been growing ever since that's why we saw just recently the GOP shifting funds away from North Carolina and into Kansas so I think North Carolina is representative of probably a combination of the things we're seeing across the nation more progressive fervor surrounding the Democratic Party enhancing the disfavorability of the Republican Party and the importance of name recognition with people like, um, we mentioned John Ossoff and especially Roy Cooper and North Carolina right

Cooper: and I think I'm glad that you highlighted the finances because I think that's really indicative of the interpretations of the race because a lot of what we're basing off of is polling which again polling can be wrong and has been wrong in the past. In 2024 there were projections that Iowa would have put blue and nationwide we saw a red wave. Although also in last year 2025 we saw multiple races like in Virginia for example in their governor's race, we saw now Governor Spanberger having a much wider lead on election day than she was projected to, so I think when we're looking at polling it can't be a surefire example of how outcomes are going to be, but since we're looking at the financing, I think the fact that Republicans have pulled their financing out of North Carolina, I think that's the most indicative to show that they don't may not see North Carolina as winnable anymore. So I think it's a very good objective test to see where exactly Republicans might view their election map widening or shrinking.

Jack: Yeah, I think that's an interesting perspective, and you can see the difference in funding across the board. For example, we saw Texas receive massive amounts of funding from Democrats in the beginning, which started off this race. And speaking of finances, another state that has been largely untouched for a while has been Ohio. Ohio has been a GOP stronghold, but we're seeing in both of their Senate and their governor races that they're becoming much closer. What are your thoughts on Ohio?

Cooper: Yeah, I think, in terms of John Husted, I think is a really interesting example of Republicans kind of straying away from Donald Trump. John Husted the Republican has especially been talking about how he doesn't want data centers that he wants to end the Iran war and being a sitting member of Congress, I think, making those statements is at least an attempt to try and stray away from maybe a broader, uh, political standpoint for the Republican Party so I think his, like, slight deviations might go to show how the Republican Party is managing as being the incumbents. But then looking at Sherrod Brown, I think Sherrod is a very strong candidate a former Senate member in the state of Ohio so someone I think it's you've got capable people on both sides so I think Ohio's is really going to be an important flashpoint, where in other state races you might have a little bit more lopsidedness in terms of reputability. I think Ohio is really important because of how strong both candidates are in different ways.

Jack: Yeah something interesting that I was more so curious about that may have no impact because Husted replaced J.D. Vance's seat, um; he's never actually won an election for Senate. And, like you mentioned, Sherrod Brown has been representing Ohio as a multi-term Senator, so do you think that experience in Senate races, specifically, is going to play a big role? Cause Hu-Husted hasn't won a statewide election, do you think the difference in experience at the federal level is going to have a major impact on the race?

Cooper: In terms of Sherrod Brown, um, cause I think that's the, y'know, the object of this race more so, um, Sherrod Brown lost his past race to someone with no previous experience. So especially when we are matching up these candidates against each other, sure, its good to evaluate them as individuals, but specifically the dynamics against each other is the most important thing. So when we're looking at federal experience, I think that's something that John Husted might have a little bit more of a leg up on this, especially given, uh, Sherrod Brown's past, but also, again, in this national environment, I think that complicates things way more than a simple statewide match-up could be.

Jack: Yeah. And the last important thing about Ohio *ahem* is, um, the difference between their two races. Um, if I'm not mistaken, I think Husted is a littel bit ahead in the polls, if not dead even–

Cooper: –Slightly, yes–

Jack: Um, and we see in the governorship race between Amy Acton and Vivek Ramaswamy, who was a figure in the last presidential cycle, um, that race is leaning a lot more heavily

towards the democrats, so why do you think that is, especially considering that there is a difference in the opposite way in terms of name recognition.

Cooper: Yeah, I think-eh… a lot of it is due to voter interpretation, um, because a lot of times federal representatives might, I mean, obviously, have different access to levels of power, um, so when you are kind of applying gubernatorial trends versus senatorial or other federal trends, I think it's really important to recognize: what are voters' important issues today? A lot of people think it's data centers; a lot of people think it's gas prices. Federal representatives control gas prices, and state representatives control data centers, and so, outlining which issues voters are particularly sensitive to, I think, really determines the effects of those races, because you're kind of seeing those splits in favorability, not only in Ohio, but again, in Iowa and Kansas as well, where there are very different levels of enthusiasm for voters on both sides for both races. Where you might have more favorability in Iowa for Democrats in the governorship than in the Senate, same with Ohio and then the reverse in Kansas. So I think it's something that needs to be considered is the specific issues.

Jack: Yeah, absolutely. And the last thing I'll say about this race is, I think it's also important to recognize that, if he wins, Vivek Ramaswamy would be the first Indian statewide official in Ohio and the first Buddhist statewide official in Ohio, so, um, I'm not gonna say one thing or another about electability because obviously, we don't know, but I think it is important to recognize, um, the uniqueness of Vivek as a candidate, in Ohio specifically. But, we've been talking a lot about statewide races; how are we feeling about the House?

Cooper: So, I think that House is obviously the most… the biggest point of contention, um, in this not only last year, but for this midterm. I'm sort of surprised how little media coverage is directed towards the House on the whole, especially given the gerrymandering that occurred. Um, because I think that is going to be the biggest outcome that we are going to see, um, is given the states that have gerrymandered, kind of, what those impacts are going to be? I mean, do you have any comment on gerrymandering as a whole or in specific areas?

Jack: I'm sure you'll cover it, um, but for those not aware, we're from Missouri; that's uh, pretty much on our-on our backdoor, in our backyard, in terms of gerrymandering, and it's been um really interesting to see, and specifically to us, we're both from Kansas City, which is uh the part that's getting gerrymandered, so it's just been very… in our face, and, um, honestly, very interesting to see it all play out considering our personal connection. I'll let you cover some of the realer impacts of that.

Cooper: Yeah, so, I know we've talked a little about the national environment. So one of the biggest impacts on gerrymandering, cause there's been 15 (*17) attempts; 9 have been successful, 4 are still fully undecided, Missouri is included, and 4 have been out-and-out failures. So when we're kind of looking at those overall, we have to understand that, um, how exactly are these gerrymandered maps attempting to benefit one party over another? We have seen the Republicans the most, um, doing it in roughly 7 different states, Texas being the

largest, but you've also got states like, um, Louisiana, um, Tennessee, South Carolina it failed; states like Missouri, they attempted. The goal is to gain roughly about 10 to 14 seats, um, if the election cycle goes correctly. Democrats have also done the same. Um, in Utah, uh, a gerrymander went into effect that Democrats are actually gaining a seat out of Salt Lake City, um, and 5 more out of California. But the biggest impact overall as to whether or not these will be effective is because these maps were based off of 2024 numbers, and what our polling shows is that we're not operating in the same national environment as 2024, in terms of favorability towards Republicans. So when we're examining how these gerrymandered maps are going to benefit Republicans as intended and Democrats, likewise, you have to understand that there are only 21 toss-up races as defined by the Cook Political Report. A majority of them, 75%, 16 of the 21, are Republican incumbent seats, so it's overall showing that when we are looking at what states and what races are the most, um, competitive, it's looking like Republicans are a little bit more on the chopping block, regardless of these gerrymanderings. Um, and I think that's really important when we're considering congressional control.

Jack: Yeah, and building off of that, I'm not totally sure of the exact numbers, how are the–how's the broader breakdown of the House? Are Democrats projected to win right now? If so, by what margin, just for some broader context?

Cooper: Um, as it is right now, Republicans only hold a majority by, I think it's 2 seats, um, 417 to 415 just because of 2 vacancies currently. Um, and so it's like, that's a really razor-thin margin. Um, and so when we're looking at favorability of winning, obviously it comes down to the race by race, but when we're looking at states or seats that are more likely to flip, you're seeing when we're looking at lean Democrat seats versus lean Republican seats, there are exactly 2 uh incumbent Democrats that are looking lean Republican right now, outside of the 21 toss-ups, and we're looking at 7 Republican seats that are lean Democrat. And so when we're looking at overall control, it's most likely going to go to the Democrats. Obviously, nothing is stated until Election Day, but looking at the numbers, and Midterms historically don't trend in favor of the presidency. Um, you saw that under Barack Obama in 2010. You saw that under Joe Biden in 2022. Um, and we'll likely see it again, although likely with an asterisk.

Jack: Yeah, and the last thing that I'll put on this whole discussion um, is in terms of polling, we've been talking a lot about polling, and how you should never trust the polls and you should go out and vote, which is absolutely true. Um, and that's an important sentiment. That being said, over the past 3 elections or 3 election cycles, the midterm elections have a substantially lower margin of error to the actual polling numbers, so like you mentioned in 2016 and then again in 2024, Republicans far outperformed the polls, in terms of statehouse and the presidency. Um, and Donald Trump isn't on the ballot this time, which historically indicates polls are closer to average. Again, adding to that ambiguity of if the polls are going to end up correctly guessing how this election cycle ends up.

Cooper: Right, and overall, in terms of, again, controlling Congress, Republicans control both houses; if they lose one house, it means Donald Trump is less likely to pass legislation. If

Democrats take both houses, it's a fundamental kind of restructuring of what the government could look like for the next two years, so, in this case, when there's so many close races, every vote really counts, no matter whose vote it is.

Jack: Absolutely, and I think that's the most important lesson that we should pass on to everyone else. Extemp aside, um, the activity we do is about advocacy, and the most important form of advocacy is using your voice in a democratic way, so make sure to register to vote if you can.

Cooper: Or encourage those around you to as well.

Jack: Absolutely.

Cooper: With that being said, thank you for tuning into the Xtempore podcast. I've been your co-host, Cooper.

Jack: I'm Jack.

Cooper: Join us again!