

# THE ECONOMIC CLUB

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O F W A S H I N G T O N, D. C.

## **Signature Event**

### **Post-Election Panel**

**Mike Allen**  
**Co-Founder**  
**Axios**

**Nikole Killion**  
**Congressional Correspondent**  
**CBS News**

**Kasie Hunt**  
**Anchor and Chief National Affairs Analyst**  
**CNN Worldwide**

**Bret Baier**  
**Chief Political Anchor and Anchor of “Special Report with Bret Baier”**  
**FOX News**

**Charlie Cook**  
**Founder and Contributor**  
**The Cook Political Report with Amy Walter**

**Moderator**  
**David Rubenstein,**  
**Co-Founder and Co-Chairman of The Carlyle Group**  
**Author, “How to Invest”**

**Washington, D.C.**  
**Monday, Nov. 14, 2022**

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: So, we have a great panel to talk about what happened in the election. And let me – if I went through their entire bios it would take all night, so I will give a very brief introduction. Charlie Cook is the founder of The Cook Political Report, which is well-known as the bible for what’s happening around the election world. Mike Allen is a co-founder of Axios. Kasie Hunt is a[n] anchor at CNN Worldwide and national affairs analyst as well. Bret Baier is the chief political anchor at Fox News and also the anchor on the Bret Baier “Special Report.” And Nikole Killian is the congressional correspondent for CBS.

OK. So how come all of you got it wrong? [Laughter.] I mean, everybody said it was going to be a red wave and, you know, I was expecting a red wave. Charlie, what happened?

CHARLIE COOK: I never used that word. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MIKE ALLEN: Yeah, you called it a tsunami.

MR. COOK: Never did. No, that was ’94. No, the thing is, we expected that Democrats would have a challenging night; that, you know, everything was – seemed to be stacked against them. The House was gone and the Senate, gosh, they would have been lucky if they kept their losses down to one. Then things, obviously, changed. And I don’t think – well, first of all, I think – I don’t think – most of us, I don’t think we ever used the word “wave.” I mean, that came up kind of revisionist after Tuesday.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Somebody was saying it was going to be a wave, I don’t know. Who was it?

MR. COOK: But it – clearly, the economy and inflation meant less than we thought it would. Abortion and Dobbs meant more. But I do think the candidate quality and former President Trump and MAGA becoming toxic – I mean, here’s a statistic. Republicans won the national popular vote Tuesday by 4.9 percentage points. That’s like four points more than Biden’s popular vote margin was in 2020. Now, they didn’t get the votes in the right place, just like –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: There were more Republican votes cast than Democratic votes?

MR. COOK: Yes. Yes, but just in the wrong places. Not in competitive races. Not where they needed them.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Mike, what went wrong? Did you guys get it wrong, or did you get it right?

MR. ALLEN: Axios always gets it right. [Laughter.] And before we plunge in, thanking Mary, Judy, their team for this great event. And a quick shout-out to my colleague Sophia Cai, who’s one of this city’s great rising-star journalists who’s here and has had great coverage of this cycle.

And it’s a 50-50 country, between the 40s. We’re not a this way, that way kind of country, and that was reflected in the polls. Moderation nation.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. What’s your take?

KASIE HUNT: So, the way that I do my job, I'm not – you know, unlike Charlie, I don't take – you know, I don't spend time looking across the map at every race and sorting them into categories or having that full picture. I'm not a pollster. What I do is I talk to campaigns and operatives and candidates/lawmakers about what they're seeing and how they're making their decisions. And the reality is that much of the information that both – and one of the things I look for is: Are Republicans and Democrats telling me the same thing or are they telling me different things? Because you got to sort through, OK, who's telling you the truth, who's not.

But the reality is much of the best data gathering right now is actually being done by private organizations, many of which are partisan, some of which are not. But they're doing these daily tracking polls. And so, when I am on TV trying to describe what's going on, I try to say, look, this is what I'm hearing from people who are out there running races, trying to get their candidates elected. And the reality was that in the summer Democrats felt really good, Republicans were pretty stressed out except for a handful of guys in the Senate like John Thune and Mitch McConnell, who were sort of more Steady Eddie the whole time; and that at the end Republicans felt extremely good about where they were going to be and Democrats were really nervous. You had people like Elissa Slotkin out in public starting to say things like we don't have a message on the economy, you know, why have we not been able to get it together so far on this. And so, I think that the information that campaigns were using to make decisions about what to do in the final days and weeks was reflecting a broad and deep assumption that it was going to be a red wave.

Now, if you look at the polling, there are people out there today arguing, saying, oh, the polls got it right this time, so you, media, why did you get it wrong. And you know, I think that's actually a valid question, but I think one of the things we've seen – and the polling was wrong in 2016 and 2020 – Donald Trump was on the ballot both of those times. And a lot of people who actually work in polling will say that they have thought a lot about: Why did we not capture what happens when Donald Trump is on the ballot? What's going on there that we screwed this up? They've tried to correct for it. The reality is he wasn't on the ballot this time and the polls –

MR. ALLEN: It was a little bit the last war.

MS. HUNT: Right, exactly. And that's the other thing about political coverage that I always try to be acutely aware of, and that's why I try to never say things like there will definitely be a red wave on television – [laughs] – because you can cover the last campaign.

BRET BAIER: I think – well, I think Kasie's on to something here. Publicly and privately, people were telling us on both sides of the aisle that this is what they were seeing and feeling. On inflation – Republicans had a big advantage in every poll about handling inflation, on immigration, on crime. And the spread was really big on handling that, 17 points for Republicans. And people in the Democratic side said, wow, this is going to be bad, and they were bracing themselves.

The problem was is that the pundit class said that you know what, the threat to democracy close by President Biden is really misplaced, it's horrible, and the focus on abortion by Democrats is just misplaced – you know, it's so summer. Well, it wasn't. And the threat to democracy actually enveloped Donald Trump, so he wasn't on the ballot but yet he was. And

early voting, the machinery of the Democratic Party to get the early vote and get people to the polls before Election Day was so superior to Republicans that I don't think we fully appreciated it until the actual raw vote comes in. Tonight, Maricopa County comes in in about 10 minutes and we should see some more races start to develop. But –

MS. HUNT: If Sam Feist leaves, that's why.

MR. BAIER: Yeah, yeah. [Laughter.] But we can't call these things because some of them are down to 80, 90 votes. It's amazing.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

NIKOLE KILLION: You know, I would argue, though, to the contrary, I don't think that the media got it wrong. You know, our job as journalists is to tell both sides. And I can say, you know, to Kasie's point, you know, talking to both sides, they were giving us different takes. I mean, I can tell you, talking to Newt Gingrich a couple of weeks prior to the election, he said he thought Republicans would get 15 to 70 – seven-zero – seats. You know, you had GOP Conference Chair Elise Stefanik the day of the election posting a picture literally of a red wave. So, I would argue it was not necessarily the media. Certainly many, you know, pundits/analysts might have been projecting that, but in terms of journalists I don't think we were.

I think we were reporting what we were being told. I think in terms of Speaker Pelosi, she remained very bullish up until the final minutes – up until now, really, still bullish on Democrats' chances of holding the majority. Kevin McCarthy was one who, in the times that I have spoke to him, never tipped his hand on how many seats he thought he could get. He always said we just need five. Leader McConnell was very clear that this was going to be very close, they're going to slog it out. So, I think in terms of listening to the leaders, they were pretty clear on where they thought this would end up.

I think in talking to a lot of strategists, certainly, right before the election there were a lot of Republican strategists out there who were very giddy and who thought that this wave was coming. And that is why now I think you are seeing a bit of reckoning in terms of what went wrong, why they didn't get that many seats. You know, Rick Scott was someone who projected they thought they would get 52 seats plus in the Senate, and they didn't, so that's why now there's this push to push back the leadership elections. And so, I do think you have, you know, kind of a come-to-Jesus moment for Republicans but also for Democrats in terms of why this was so close on their end as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, we have a consensus that journalists and the media people did a good job? Is that more or less – [laughter] –

MS. KILLION: Well –

MR. COOK: That we were reflecting what strategists, what the people that are the arms and legs of both parties were saying as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So, in the last presidential election – how many people voted in the last presidential election? And in this election, what percentage of people was it? Is it –

MR. COOK: It was 157, 159 million in 2020. And –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: How many voted in this election? Is it like –

MR. COOK: It was like 130 [million], maybe?

MR. BAIER: Yeah, 129 [million].

MR. COOK: There you go.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: 130 [million] versus –

MR. COOK: I'm talking about tomorrow. You said yesterday.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, 130, – 130 million people, is that what you're saying, voted in this election. How many voted in the last presidential? It's a hundred and?

MR. COOK: 159 [million]. Same thing, yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh, so it's not – OK. So, who was the biggest winner out of the election? [Pause.] [Laughter.] Well?

MR. COOK: No, it's – well, the thing is we don't know yet. But I think – I'm trying to think of a question [you're going to ?] ask in a minute, but –

MR. ALLEN: Chuck Schumer, right?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So, you don't have an answer yet who you think is the biggest winner. Who's the biggest loser?

MR. COOK: President Trump. I mean, the thing is the guy that recruited – the guy that recruited Dr. Oz, the guy that recruited Herschel Walker, the guy that went along with Masters.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, the biggest loser is Trump, in your view, and the biggest winner is?

MR. COOK: I think the Republican Party ultimately because I think day to day to day the odds of him becoming president again are getting less and less and less over the last year.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So, Mike, who is the biggest winner in this election?

MR. ALLEN: Leader Schumer is the biggest winner at this moment. And everything's not called. We're all watching Sam Feist. But we don't – the House isn't yet called. But going into this, Kasie's right, like, Democrats were not particularly super optimistic. And now you have Chuck Schumer back, so you got to call him the big one.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The biggest loser? The biggest winner, you're saying, is –

MR. ALLEN: And Donald Trump was unquestionably damaged by what happened. Now, I will say anybody that says to you in the same sentence as Donald Trump “this time it’s different,” be cautious. But there’s no question that he was damaged by this item.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Kasie, who was the biggest winner, biggest loser?

MS. HUNT: I mean, Bret Baier, this was out of his mouth before it was out of mine, but I think Ron DeSantis is the biggest winner of this election. I mean, he won Florida by 1.5 million votes. I mean, his performance there was astonishing. And it really, I think, potentially changes the calculus for him in terms of, you know, what’s on the table.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And he overcame being sanctimonious? That wasn’t a big problem for him? [Laughter.]

MS. HUNT: I think it might have helped him – [laughs] – a little bit.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Biggest loser?

MS. HUNT: I mean, you know, I was sitting here thinking while they were talking about it. I mean, look, I don’t think it’s necessarily wrong to say Trump was the biggest loser. I’m tempted to say Rick Scott, although if there’s someone that works for him in this room, they will have my head for saying that, because he was involved in recruiting a lot of the Senate candidates that just didn’t perform to the degree that Republicans thought they should have.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Bret, biggest winner, biggest loser?

MR. BAIER: Yeah. I mean, I do think DeSantis comes out of this with a lot of steam behind him and, you know, a lot of Republicans shifting loyalties, I think. And in that sense, he’s a big winner. And he wins different counties like Miami-Dade County, which hasn’t been won by a Republican since Jeb Bush. So, I think he’s a big winner.

I think the biggest loser individually was probably Doug Mastriano, the candidate for governor in Pennsylvania, really had no chance. But in essence, to Charlie’s point, it’s the people who pushed those candidates, and there goes back to Donald Trump.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Biggest winner, biggest loser?

MS. KILLION: Well, I don’t want to pick a winner – [laughs] – or a loser. What I will say is I do think that the American people and the American voters were the biggest winners in terms of the level of turnout that we saw in this midterm. As someone who spent a lot of time on the ground in Georgia, I mean, we saw record turnout in that state, on par with presidential levels. So, I think that that says something for the state of our democracy. But I also think that the American people and voters may be losers in this because government is so closely divided, and so it begs the question what actually will get done. You know, people voted because they want to see something happen, but realistically, with the margins so tight, I think it’s –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You know, nobody’s mentioned as a big winner the president of the United States. He wasn’t considered by any of you a big winner out of this? Nobody?

MR. COOK: I don't think it was about him. The fact is, there are two Republican parties, and one Republican Party did fine, and one did really, really badly. So, sort of the legacy/conventional/establishment wing of the party, their candidates did reasonably well. It's the exotics.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Charlie, all right. Now, the election –

MS. HUNT: [Laughs.] I'm stealing that from you, Charlie.

MR. COOK: Well, it's –

MR. BAIER: Exotic. [Laughter.]

MR. COOK: Exotic and potentially problematic because my wife doesn't want me to say, "wacko wing." [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The election in Georgia, we're in a runoff election in Georgia. It may not be quite as consequential as we may have thought a couple days ago, but who's going to win that? Just tell us now. [Laughter.]

MR. COOK: The thing is that, had President Trump acted like a 10-year-old instead of a 4-year-old after the November 2020 election, Republicans would have held onto both seats, as they had won 20 consecutive years of Georgia Senate races. And so – but trashing your governor, trashing your secretary of state, telling Republican voters that, hey, your votes weren't counted, it tanked their two candidates, which is why Mitch McConnell hasn't spoken to the guy since.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, who's going to win that runoff?

MR. COOK: Well, I don't think the – I don't think things are going to look the way – I don't think the turnout is going to look the way it did two years ago, and I think that's a challenge for Democrats.

MR. BAIER: There is one thing about the runoff that's really interesting and that is it's not control of the Senate. Chuck Schumer will be the Senate majority leader. However, if it is 50-50, there is a sharing agreement where the committees would be split, they wouldn't have subpoena power – the Democrats – which is the current deal now, with Vice President Harris breaking the tie. So, for Republicans, there is a little on the line. It's just tough to put on a bumper sticker we don't want subpoena power for the Democrats. [Laughter. So, there will be a little bit lack of, you know, maybe fire in the turnout.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. All right. Kasie.

MS. HUNT: I'm interested that Charlie thinks that this will make it harder for the Democrats. I respect him very much. My sort of initial reporting and sense was that it might be a little tougher – that if Herschel Walker was going to be a senator, it was going to be because he got 50 percent on Election Day and that there were clearly a lot of people who just couldn't stomach voting for him who voted for Brian Kemp, and are those people really going to bother to show up in four weeks for a runoff when the Senate is not on the line. It seems to me that that's, like, a harder

argument to make, whereas there have been more positive reasons for Democrats to show up for Raphael Warnock. We'll see.

MR. BAIER: Yeah. Who's Georgia playing?

MS. HUNT: [Laughs.] That's a good question.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Mike, who is going to be the next speaker of the House? Mike? The next speaker of the House, will that be Kevin McCarthy for sure?

MR. ALLEN: It will. And –

MR. BAIER: Most likely. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The House will –

MR. ALLEN: But he's having – he's having to fight for it in a way that he certainly didn't expect to.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. And will Nancy Pelosi stay as the Democratic leader? Mike, you must know.

MR. ALLEN: I'm going to give – I'm going to give that one to Kasie.

MS. HUNT: [Laughs.]

MS. KILLION: I think – I think that remains to be seen. I think, you know, in talking to a lot of top Democrats, they have made clear – even those who know and work with Speaker Pelosi very closely, even they aren't sure. And I think it's because the speaker doesn't really tip her hand, and they know that. And so, as she has made clear, she will make her decision after the election. And I think for the most part, we're going to have to take her at her word.

I will say, in talking to some people who have worked closely with her in the past and other sources, you know, I think the sense is that, you know, what we saw her do over this past two years kind of cements her legacy, whether that was going to Taiwan, getting a lot of major legislation passed on a bipartisan basis, which is something Leader Schumer has also talked about. So, I do think there are some signals that she has – [laughs] – done things to kind of shore up her legacy, but on the same token she has been a very powerful and dynamic speaker and I think if she leaves it's going to be on her own terms.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Does anybody have a view that she's going to leave right away, or anybody have a view that she's going to stay for another – finish this term?

MR. ALLEN: I'm dodging. But a quick interjection. One of the great Washington quotes of all time, which I believe was on Kasie and Sam's air, Speaker Pelosi said: The speaker has a lot of power. I will always have influence. If you know her, you can appreciate that.

MR. BAIER: Yeah. I think that she's setting the table to leave, and I think Hakeem Jeffries is positioning himself in a way to be the next speaker.



MS. HUNT: Yeah. Democrats in her caucus expect her to step down, and there is a plan in place, and that plan –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And she will be likely replaced by whom as the leader?

MS. HUNT: Hakeem Jeffries, yeah. And that would not be happening if it wasn't OK with her. But that said, if she – if there's a perception that she's being pushed out, forget it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But if Hakeem Jeffries from New York is the – is the Democratic leader, what about the other people who are in the current House leadership? Are they going to step aside or be challenged by younger people?

MS. HUNT: I mean, we have to see exactly how it plays out, but the sort of deal that's on the table at the moment is that Hakeem Jeffries is able to step into the top – the top job with an agreement with Jim Clyburn, the number three, to avoid splitting votes inside the Congressional Black Caucus. That potentially clears the way. Steny Hoyer is clearly very still interested in sticking around. But I think there's a lot of interest in making sure that there's a woman in leadership, so Kathleen [sic; Katherine] Clark is the person that's likely to step up and run for the number-two job. I think if Clyburn wishes to stay as the number three, he'll be there.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Bret, tomorrow night there's supposed to be an announcement in Florida, in Mar-a-Lago.

MR. BAIER: Really? [Laughter.]

MS. HUNT: Mike's going.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Not that you have any special insight, but do you have any views on whether President Trump is going to announce that he is going to run again, or he's just going to retire and build his library, or what?

MR. BAIER: I would take the over, that he's probably going to jump in, although I think that there are a lot of voices inside the party that are trying to at least delay that. But I think that he's probably going to get in the race. I didn't think that he was going to for some time, but this leadup suggests that he is. That said, the party is split and you're starting to see a lot of different dynamics. And you know, we've talked a lot about polls. There are some new polls in swing states that suggest that his support is diminishing.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, some people were surprised that The New York Post seemed to have turned on Donald Trump recently. You may have observed that. Can you tell us anything about that?

MR. COOK: Take the Fifth, Bret.

MR. BAIER: Yeah, Fifth. [Laughter.]

MR. COOK: Take the Fifth.

MR. BAIER: Is this C-SPAN? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Any insights you can give us?

MR. BAIER: I'll just say this. There is no internal memo from above. That's not how it happens. But I think if you read The Wall Street Journal and The New York Post, their editorial kind of speaks for itself.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, Mike, let me ask you this. This administration's gone longer than any I can recall without a Cabinet officer being replaced or quitting or having a scandal or something. Anybody going to leave in the second two years of the Biden administration? Who's going to leave?

MR. ALLEN: We're about to see some big changes. And that's the big advantage, the big consequence of Democrats holding the Senate, that it gives President Biden much more flexibility in making moves in his Cabinet. He'll know that he can get new Cabinet members confirmed.

A great piece of reporting by our Axios colleague Hans Nichols is that one figure that the Biden administration is looking to bring in is someone close to Wall Street, someone close to business. They want to improve their ties to business. The quote that we had from the West Wing was getting a 360 view of business conditions. So that's one change that I would look for sooner rather than later.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Some people have said that the secretary of treasury might be stepping down after the election. Any insights on that, Mike? No?

MR. ALLEN: So, when Secretary Yellen moves on, a couple possibilities to replace her. But that is – that is one that people are watching. And one more immediate than that, the National Economic Council director, Brian Deese. They've said that he's going. That's a big job in the center of the West Wing that will be open.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Kasie, in the Republican side in the Senate, it's been said that somebody might challenge McConnell to be the leader of the Republicans in the Senate. Do you think anybody has the votes to do that and to beat him?

MS. HUNT: No. No.

MR. ALLEN: Smart brevity.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: No? [Laughter.] Will there be – will there be even a vote, or you think it's just – it's just press speculation? Not that the press is wrong, but –

MS. HUNT: Oh, no. I don't – so, look, I don't think it's press speculation. Again, my previous comments apply in this case. To the extent you're hearing about it in the press, it's because the press is hearing about it from people who are discontented with what's gone on. I think that there – you know, there was a very real divide between Rick Scott, the chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, and McConnell in terms of how things were handled in running these Senate campaigns. And the Scott folks were very – and are very – upset about the

way McConnell's team – in their view, they think he hurt their candidates, that he directed money away from those campaigns, and instead sent it to his own SLF. The McConnell people will be very quick to point to all of the ways in which they were correct about all of the problems that these candidates had. Scott refused to intervene in some of these primaries. That is not how McConnell does business. So that rift is extremely real.

I think the challenge is the perception is Scott was doing that for his own political benefit and attempt to get close to Trump. It backfired. All those candidates lost. McConnell is now going to – you know, whoever the Republican leader is going to be the minority leader. That's not good for any of them. They're all pissed off about it. But the reality is there's no obvious answer to someone other than McConnell to step into that role, and McConnell's allies are very solidly on his side.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, let me ask you all the same question, and just one-word answer. Is Joe Biden going to run for reelection? Yes, or no?

MR. COOK: I don't think either will be the nominee, either Trump or Biden, for their party.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. That's not yes or no, but I guess that's – [laughter]. OK. Yes or no, Biden is going to run or not?

MR. ALLEN: Today, yes.

MS. HUNT: I expect him to run.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Bret?

MR. BAIER: No.

MS. KILLION: Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow. We're split. OK. [Laughter.]

MS. HUNT: I want to hear what Buzz [sp] thinks. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, if he runs for reelection, will he keep his current vice president? Yes or – yes, or no?

MR. COOK: Yes.

MR. ALLEN: Hundred percent.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Yes?

MS. HUNT: If he runs for reelection, yes.

MS. KILLION: Yes.

MR. BAIER: If he runs, yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Let's suppose he says I'm not running – I just – I just don't want to run, age, other things, whatever reason he might not want to run. Who would you say are the leading two or three candidates to get the nomination for the Democrats?

MR. COOK: I think you could look at probably 12, 15 people. Half of them ran last time and a good chunk of the others are current or former governors. So big, big, big list. But you'll get, one, Klobuchar, Buttigieg. It's going to be a lot of the same faces. And then some governors.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And if he didn't run, would he endorse anybody before the convention?  
No.

MR. COOK: I doubt it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Who would you say, Mike, are likely to be candidates if Biden doesn't run?

MR. ALLEN: Vice President Harris.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MS. HUNT: I certainly think Harris is likely to run. I would be surprised if she ever was the nominee. But I think Charlie's correct. I mean, it's – the field is wide open and a total mess, and it's a huge part of the reason why if Biden is able to run for president again, he will. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. What do you –

MR. BAIER: I mean, Gavin Newsom. You can go through a whole list. There's a cast of thousands. Jared Polis in Colorado. Josh Shapiro is a[n] up-and-comer in Pennsylvania. You've got a lot of newcomers. And I think there's hunger in both parties to find a little younger blood.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, the Republicans – if Trump is not the nominee, Republicans have a number of others. Who do you think are the – let's suppose Trump decides tomorrow night to say I'm not really running, I really – you know, I just don't want to run, I want to focus on other things. Who do you think are likely to be the leading candidates on the Republican side, Charlie, other than DeSantis? Who else is likely to get there?

MR. COOK: You stole DeSantis. To me, he has reverse-engineered the Trump appeal amazingly well. But there will be five, six, eight other people along the way. And some will be from the, you know, Never Trump side, the Larry Hogan type folks over here. Some will be a Cruz. I don't know whether Nikki Haley actually gets in or not. But I think you'll have a big, big field.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You think there's a lot of support in the Republican Party for Larry Hogan to be the nominee or Republican Party for Hogan?

MR. COOK: I'm sorry; I couldn't –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: For Hogan?

MR. COOK: Oh. No, I don't think he could win the nomination.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MR. COOK: But I think that people run for president for a lot of different reasons and, you know, having a good chance of winning is just one.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And does anybody –

MS. KILLION: Well, I would also – I mean, I would also add let's not forget former Vice President Mike Pence, who's out with a book tomorrow. I mean, I think he's made clear that he's kind of laying the groundwork and starting to put that distance between himself and the former president. You know, again, you have other members of the Trump administration – Mike Pompeo, who appears to be angling potentially for 2024.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And what about Liz Cheney? Does anybody think she will run?

MS. HUNT: I do. Well, I should say if Trump is a very real – if there is a very real possibility that Trump will be the nominee, I think Liz Cheney will run.

MR. COOK: As what?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Run as a Republican or an independent?

MS. HUNT: As a Republican. As a Republican.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But as an independent, she would draw presumably some votes away from –

MS. HUNT: I think the thinking in their camp is that if she were to run as an independent it would hurt the Democrat and make it more likely that Trump becomes president again. Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Yeah.

MR. BAIER: We should point out that Vice President Pence will be on “Special Report” tomorrow at six p.m.

MS. HUNT: And in town hall with Jake Tapper.

[Cross talk, laughter.]

MR. BAIER: I just wanted to point that out.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, you think the Republicans have an advantage in having a potential candidate who worked in the private equity industry – [laughter] – the governor of Virginia, and the Democrats don't have anybody that's been in private equity? Is that a big problem for the Democrats, do you think? [Laughter.]

MR. BAIER: Are you endorsing here?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: No. OK. So –

MR. BAIER: [Laughs.] Wait, maybe we should turn the questions.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what major piece of legislation, if any, can we expect to get out of the next two years of Congress? Kasia, anything that we're going to see? It's going to be –

MS. HUNT: We're going to be lucky if the government stays open the whole time.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Really?

MS. HUNT: Yes, assuming that the House goes the way I expect it to go.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, there was a lot of talk when the red wave was upon us that there was going to be an impeachment of Joe Biden by the Republicans in the – in the House. Anybody think that's still a possibility?

MR. BAIER: No.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: No.

MS. KILLION: May have calls for it.

MR. COOK: Will some knucklehead introduce articles of impeachment? Of course.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But.

MR. COOK: But it's not going to go anywhere.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, you don't think it'll get to a vote. What about the investigation, supposedly, of, and subpoenas of, Hunter Biden? Is that still likely?

MS. HUNT: Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: That will happen in the House?

MS. HUNT: Yes, I think.

MR. BAIER: Not if Democrats get subpoena power. Then it'll be tit for tat and there will be a standoff.

MS. HUNT: You mean in the Senate.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I see. So, the Senate – I see.

MR. ALLEN: OK, now we're getting closer to your bumper sticker.

MR. BAIER: Yeah, there we go. [Laughter.]

MS. KILLION: But House Republicans have made clear that if they take the majority, they intend to launch a number of investigations and not just into Hunter Biden. But you know, they want to look at everything from the origins of COVID. I mean, I think you should prepare to see Dr. Fauci – [laughs] – come before Congress multiple times before multiple panels. Many of the committees, you know, whether it's Oversight, have made clear that that is something that they would like to do. I know they really want to get into the issue of the border and immigration, so I think that's another area where you could see more investigations, as you will. And just kind of the general fleecing of America – [laugh] – in the sense of, you know, for instance, government agencies that may overspend or, you know, kind of digging into some of these GAO reports. I think that type of, you know, \$16 muffins at conferences – [laughs] – you know, which used to be a big story way back when, those types of things. I mean, I think you may see Republicans kind of do a broad spectrum of investigations, not just strictly focused on the Biden administration. And also, I think –

MR. BAIER: I think there will be – go ahead, I'm sorry.

MS. KILLION: Sorry. I was just going to add, on the border I think you could also expect to see Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas being brought before multiple committees as well, according to some sources I've talked to.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MR. BAIER: The lame-duck Congress don't you think is going to do something? You know, they'll do funding, but don't you think same-sex marriage has a chance?

MS. HUNT: Yes. I mean, so – yes, I do think the lame-duck session is a potentially different – I mean, there's going to be a lot of pressure to do a lot of things in a very short amount of time. I think you're right, there's going to be pressure on the gay marriage question. You know, there are some major health care initiatives that I certainly know many – I'm sure many of you in this room who deal with health care stuff are very interested to see happen before, you know, the power changes hands. The other thing is, I mean, my big question is whether they're going to try to raise the debt ceiling in advance.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Charlie, did the Oprah Winfrey endorsement of Fetterman make a big difference or not?

MR. COOK: I don't think that made a big difference. No, I don't think so.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But, all right, if you were Warnock – Senator Warnock, and you were in this runoff, who would be the one Democrat surrogate you absolutely would want to have come campaign for you? Who would be your number one?

MR. COOK: Would? I think I'd probably do Obama.

MS. KILLION: Yeah, I mean, I think Michelle Obama –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Which one? Which Obama?

MS. HUNT: Michelle.

MR. COOK: Oh, if you can get both, yeah.

MS. KILLION: I mean, I would argue when former president Obama was down there campaigning on Senator Warnock's behalf, and Stacey Abrams' behalf, I mean, there was a lot – I was in the room – there was a lot of energy in the room. And I think that is that type of driving, the turnout driving the base. That ultimately is what somebody like Senator Warnock needs to kind of, you know, be able to win this runoff. On the flipside, I think with Herschel Walker one thing that I have found intriguing is that for all the talk and alliance that he has built between himself and the former president, the former president hasn't stepped in the state once. And I think it's questionable if he will even come down for this runoff. And I think it also raises questions with the former's president's announcement as well tomorrow, if it's what we expect, if that helps or hurts.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Do you think Herschel Walker asked Trump to come and Trump just said "I'm busy," or what happened?

MS. KILLION: I mean, every time I have asked his campaign about it, I kind of get crickets. [Laughs.] Like, well, you know, we haven't talked to them, they haven't talked to us, so –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Let's suppose you're running the campaign for Herschel Walker, and you could bring in any surrogate. Who would this surrogate be that you would most want to have?

MR. BAIER: Ron DeSantis.

MS. HUNT: Ron DeSantis.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Ron DeSantis?

MR. BAIER: Hundred percent.

MS. KILLION: I think Brian Kemp.

MR. BAIER: Well, he'll be there anyway.

MS. KILLION: I think Brian Kemp. I mean, you know, Brian Kemp over performed Herschel Walker and, quite frankly, I mean, he carried the state. And so, I think – and we have still not seen the two of them on the campaign trail together. In fact, the night before the election they held events, like, literally a couple of miles apart in the same town, and neither made a cameo at each other's appearances. So, I think if Herschel Walker wants to win this, he's got –

MR. BAIER: And he's going to do it. He'll do it, yeah.

MS. KILLION: – and Brian Kemp – the governor has – the governor has said that he is going to help Walker, but – [laughs] –



MR. RUBENSTEIN: Yeah. What about bringing in, like, Tom Brady, to remind everybody about football? Bring in a football player to remind them? They wouldn't want a football player to come in to campaign for Herschel Walker?

MR. BAIER: He's got his own issues.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. [Laughter.]

MR. COOK: Well, the thing is that Republicans had a 200,000-vote drop between November of 2020 and January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – 200,000. Democrats only dropped 100,000. Those were about as awful a circumstances for Republicans as you could – as you could find, is given Trump attacking everyone. So –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: If you were the manager for Herschel Walker or Senator Warnock, would you want a debate in this runoff or not?

MS. KILLION: I think Warnock does. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Warnock wants a debate?

MS. KILLION: You know, I mean, quite frankly, that's something that Herschel Walker's talked about time and again on the campaign trail. You know, did you see me in that debate? So, I don't know, he may be open, I think, because the Atlanta Press Club is sponsoring this debate next week. I think it's doubtful that he appears, because he didn't show up for the first one. But I think there are a lot of voters out there that would like to see them side-by-side again, because I don't think they got enough out of one debate, so.

MS. HUNT: I don't know that the debate question really matters all that much. I think if you're Herschel Walker's campaign the last thing that you want – and my understanding of kind of how it played out behind the scenes is that they tried very, very hard to keep Trump out of Georgia, and that they would like it to stay that way. But if he's announcing for president tomorrow night, while Mike Allen was down there covering it, and Ron DeSantis wants to go to Georgia to campaign for Herschel Walker, good luck keeping Trump out of that mix.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Mike, you're a very quick writer. If Donald Trump called you tomorrow and said, write me a paragraph on why I should be the nominee, what would you say, if you were making the case for him?

MR. ALLEN: I'm not in that business. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You wouldn't be able to do that? I know you don't do that, but what do you think is his best case? Let's supposed you're not writing it, somebody else is writing it. What is the best case that Donald Trump can make tomorrow why he should be the nominee?

MR. ALLEN: I think he's going to argue that he speaks for a lot of America that others don't. And he will argue that he had the best administration in the history of the universe.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And when do you think, Charlie, that President Biden will make his decision about whether he's going to run or not run?

MR. COOK: I don't know. I've always thought that he would – that President Biden was most likely to run if Trump was running, and they thought he'd stay in, and least likely to run if Trump was not running. But you know, I had kind of thought that Trump – former President Trump would sort of jack his party around for four or five months. So, if it actually does happen tomorrow, I'll be a surprised person.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MS. KILLION: I think – and I would add – I think Anita Dunn made clear just as recently as this weekend that the president would either make that decision at the end of the year or early next year. I know we recently sat down with Cedric Richmond, who used to be a senior advisor for the president, who said that he too thinks maybe it's more likely sometime next year. So, I think that's the timetable we're working with for a decision.

MR. BAIER: Well, I'll just point out that as we were leading into this election there were a lot of Democrats who were very vocal, suddenly, that they did not want President Biden to run. And there were editorials, and anonymous sources, but then public people saying: Don't run, President Biden. And now post-this election, there are people coming out saying he should run for reelection. So, it's interesting how this election will play, not only in the Republican Party but in the Democratic Party as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, let's suppose Ron DeSantis is going to announce he's running. And do you expect that he is by far the odds-on favorite, other than Trump, to get it? Is there any other Republican that has gotten the visibility, leaving Trump aside for a moment, that DeSantis has?

MR. BAIER: Not the visibility, but there are other Republicans who definitely would want to get in the field. As mentioned before, Mike Pompeo's been to Iowa and New Hampshire more times than any other candidate. You've got Glenn Youngkin, the Virginia governor, who's expressed some at least interest in bouncing around to other parts of the country.

MR. COOK: You know, the political graveyard, though, is filled with people that were frontrunners at this point. I mean, I remember President Phil Gramm.

MR. BAIER: How about Tim Pawlenty? [Laughter.]

MS. HUNT: No, I mean, every Republican contest – nominating contest I've ever covered, it's been like that. And my knowledge does not go back as far as yours, Charlie. [Laughs.] But that – you know, you don't – there is actually, or historically has been danger in peaking too soon. And people who are having this kind of a conversation at this point in time back in, you know, early – I mean, not even – so I guess it would have been late 2014, early 2015 – I remember I covered Trump at all kinds of early state events starting in 2013.

I covered him in Iowa. And nobody believed me when I said, I swear to God, this man is going to run for president. And I was laughed out of various conference rooms at NBC on the regular in this period of time. And that's where we end up, right? Everybody thought it was going to be – I mean, you pick – Jeb Bush was the frontrunner for a year, right? I mean, it's just – it doesn't – I think it's impossible to know at this stage.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Mike, a lot of – a fair number of House Democratic members retired, and they didn't run for reelection. Had they run, or most of them run, do you think they would have held onto those seats and the Democrats would have won the majority? Because I think they expected a so-called red wave, and they got out early. Or is that not a problem for the Democrats?

MR. ALLEN: Yeah. This – and Charlie knows it race by race – but this close? Absolutely.

MR. COOK: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean, they anticipated a horrible year, and bailed out. And one thing that was remarkable is how few incumbents at each level lost in this election. So yeah, I think a lot of them – I think a lot of them –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: At the moment, is there any chance that the House will go Democratic at this point, knowing what we now know? Do you see any chance it will go?

MR. COOK: Well, any is a big word. But I'll go with 99 percent.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You think the majority – the Republican majority will likely be how many seats, would you say?

MR. COOK: Two-twenty-two, 221?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Two-twenty-one or 22?

MR. BAIER: Maybe 219. I mean, there's a couple races that, as I said, are about 80 votes. I will point out that the red wave did hit Florida. And it also at least trickled into New York, because there were a lot of House seats, based on that Zeldin run for governor, that did change hands. So, but if you look at Florida, that's about as red wavey as you can get, which is where the plus 4.9 – you know, there's a lot of big –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Did the head of the House Democratic Congressional Committee lose his seat?

MR. BAIER: Sean Patrick Maloney.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right.

MR. BAIER: New York.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, if they could have held onto that seat, it would have been –

MR. COOK: No, Kevin McCarthy is going to develop a real appreciation for Nancy Pelosi and her skills. Because he's going to have his hands full, and he won't be responsible for governing, and it's still going to be hard for him with that kind of margin.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, some people would say the Republicans didn't handle well the attack on Speaker Pelosi's husband. Do you think that had any impact at all, or no impact, on the election? Any of you?

MS. HUNT: I think it had some impact in galvanizing Democrats and reminding them of why it was that all of these other arguments should be considered salient this year. You know, I think there were, as Brett said, a lot of questions about President Biden's decision to close on the democracy question. I think the attack on Pelosi really plays into that, because it's about political violence, what happened on January 6th, you know, where – how do we actually conduct this business in our country, what does it mean to do democracy at the ballot box and not by other means. And so, I do think it played into it. I'm not sitting here and telling you I think it made the difference, but I think it was part of a list of things that fall into that category.

MR. COOK: I think if it made a difference, it was with that 5, 6, 7 percent that are – pure independents, or undecideds. I think that's where it would make – to me, both sides' bases were at 100 percent going – you know, before that even happened.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I see. So, do you think that the independents broke more for the Democrats or for the Republicans in this?

MR. COOK: Yeah, by four points in one exit poll, and two in the other. We're talking about the pure independents, the ones that don't lean either way, four in one, two in the other. But Democrats were – led in both. And that's unheard of for a midterm election. Except for 2002.

MR. BAIER: Exactly. That's right. And so, when we were looking at inflation, and we were looking at crime, and the independents were overwhelmingly going towards Republicans. But on the abortion and threats to democracy, they were overwhelmingly going to Democrats.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, when people are polling – we always look at polls – how did the pollsters actually get people on the phone? Because most people don't have land lines that they're answering anymore. So, are they getting them on their cellphones? And what kind of person actually spends 30 minutes giving an answer to somebody?

MS. HUNT: Who picks up an unknown number? [Laughs.]

MR. COOK: I think there's a good reason why private equity firms don't invest in political polling firms, right? It has gotten very, very expensive.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Yeah, I agree. But how do they actually do this? Do they get cellphone numbers and they just keep calling until they –

MR. COOK: In a previous life, I worked with a polling firm. And you'd get 20-25 completions out of 100 calls. Now you're lucky if you got one. I mean, you just keep doing it. I mean, it's – so they're looking for alternative ways of reaching people, online, through text, everything. But this year actually they were pretty good. They really were.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And they're pretty good. So, you would say that – are the pollsters going to change their techniques or they think they got it down?

MR. COOK: Well, they have changed. They've changed it a lot. But the thing is, there are still undecided voters. And occasionally, undecideds decide, you know, in the last week or two. And they usually don't break down the middle. They go one way or the other. And that's what, I

think, throws a lot of people off. The polls weren't necessarily wrong, they just identified undecideds.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, there were reports of people waiting five hours or more to vote. Seems like a long time to wait, but did you hear any apocryphal stories about people waiting longer than that? Or is that fairly typical in this election, people were waiting three, four, five hours to vote?

MR. COOK: I bet ten times more people did it in three minutes. Most people do not have to walk over ground glass or hot coals to vote. It really isn't hard. They make it quite easy, actually.

MR. BAIER: But it's heinous how long it's taken to get these votes counted. I mean, Florida did it in five hours with 7.5 million votes. This Arizona situation is unbelievable, and California is weeks. If FedEx can track a package around the world to my house, we should, as a country, be able to count votes in one night.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Why do you think so few losers in this election didn't yell fraud, or I'm going to wait for a couple weeks to see more counting? They seem to be conceding relatively quickly in most cases. Is that a surprise to you?

MR. BAIER: It's a happy surprise. I mean, I think we were prepared for some more people to challenge. But it doesn't seem to be happening. However, again, we're waiting on Arizona and a couple of California races.

MR. COOK: But that's the most positive thing to come out of this election. That really is.

MR. BAIER: It really is.

MS. HUNT: A hundred percent.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what do you think people overseas are thinking about this election, that the U.S. maybe got its democracy slightly more organized than before? Or what do you think people overseas are thinking about this election? Any of you?

MR. COOK: I think it'll be years before we get credibility back, before we get back to where we were five, six, eight years ago. Years.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So today, if you were advising President Biden, would you advise him to send up a lot of legislation now? Or just say, you know, he's not going to pass very much in the Republican House. Just get the appropriations bills done and that's about it?

MR. BAIER: I'd look for something you can get some agreement with.

MS. KILLION: Well, I think it'll be interesting to see whether or not the parties can come together on the issue of inflation. I think Republicans have made clear that they want to tackle it in some kind of way. You know, originally, they said this, if they got the majority, but clearly this was one of the defining issues of the election. You know, according to our exit polls I think

it was something like seven in 10 voters expressed that the economy and the inflation was one of their top concerns.

So how do they get at that issue? And can they get at it in a meaningful way? You know, we saw obviously the Inflation Reduction Act pass. You know, we saw there was talk at the beginning of this year about trying to, you know, ease the gas tax. You know whether or not that kind of talk will come back again, I don't know. But to me, that seems like a good starting point for both parties, if they want to try to deliver on some of these concerns that voters expressed.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Republicans had said in the House they were going to pass legislation to get rid of the 85,000 extra IRS agents. Is that likely to pass at this point, or can they get that through?

MS. HUNT: It might pass the House. It's not going to pass the Senate. I mean –

MR. BAIER: It wouldn't pass the Senate. And it's 87,000. I'm just – [laughter] –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MR. BAIER: It's not a lot, just a little. [Inaudible] – a lot.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I mean, I hate to think this, but would the Republicans take advantage of their majority, if they have a majority in the House, pass legislation that they know cannot pass in the Senate?

MS. HUNT: Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: They would do that?

MS. HUNT: I mean, that's called a messaging bill. Yes, it happens. I mean, Democrats have been doing it for years. Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Now, in the previous Congress Senator Manchin in the Senate had an enormous amount of power. Now if the Democrats have a one seat – let's suppose they win in Georgia. Is Manchin still going to be able to have that kind of power, or will that have faded?

MS. HUNT: Honestly, if they can win that seat in Georgia, it will be the best thing that has ever happened to Joe Manchin, because he can just vote away without any pressure from the White House. He can vote against every nominee. He can vote against every piece of legislation. It'll make it easier for Democrats who want to keep the majority because they'll have to worry less about him switching parties to try to –

MR. ALLEN: And he's up in '24.

MR. COOK: Empower somebody else to beat Joe Manchin.

MS. HUNT: Right. It actually – I mean, Kyrsten Sinema becomes their bigger problem, honestly. Or, like, the person – which, you know, she will love. She is clearly enjoying kind of

the time in the spotlight that she has. But I think, you know, Manchin is facing, you know, a very, very difficult reelection fight in 2024. And if he's the 50th vote for a Democratic majority, that is a very, very difficult place to be.

MR. BAIER: It also makes that race a little bit more interesting. If it's 50/50, the recruitment of Kyrsten Sinema will be front and center for Mitch McConnell.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, who is the biggest fresh face in the Democratic and Republican Party that's emerged now from this election? A fresh face that, you know, can really maybe get a lot of national attention? Is there a Democrat or a –

MS. KILLION: On the Democratic side, Maxwell Frost. I mean, he's the first Gen Z member of Congress, 25. You know, was this activist with March for Our Lives. I mean – [laughs] – talk about a fresh face. I think he was just in high school a couple of years ago, so it doesn't get much fresher than that. But he does bring a lot of energy, I think, to the position. He will be replacing Congresswoman Val Demings, who wasn't successful for her Senate run. So, I think he's definitely one to watch, I think, going forward.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

MR. COOK: What about Katie Britt in Alabama?

MR. BAIER: Katie Britt's a great –

MR. COOK: She took Shelby's seat in Alabama.

MR. BAIER: She was chief of staff for Senator Shelby, now senator from Alabama. I think Josh Shapiro actually was, for me, the candidate that really encompassed a really good race, for governor of Pennsylvania.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What about Wes Moore?

MR. BAIER: In Maryland, yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Could be a fresh face that a lot of people will keep saying he should run for president, or something like that, at some point?

MS. HUNT: Sure. I mean, I think he's going to – he's going to probably occupy a space in the party that's a little different from Josh Shapiro. You know, one of the things – Shapiro took some very interesting positions in that race, kind of neutralized Republican attacks against him, including on issues like school choice and education in COVID, that I think sort of give him a profile for a general election that's a little bit different than a Wes Moore. But I absolutely see him being somebody that's – the people are watching throughout.

I also think – I mean, I am interested to see how Fetterman continues to recover from his stroke, because I think if that health event had not happened, he would be someone who's very, very talked about as a very forward face for the party. That obviously, considering his health challenges, has really receded and it's not something we're talking about right now. But if he does make a full recovery, I wouldn't be surprised if that starts to be –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Suppose Dave McCormick had been the Republican nominee in the Senate in Pennsylvania. Think he would have won that seat?

MR. COOK: Absolutely.

MS. HUNT: Agree.

MR. BAIER: I do.

MR. COOK: But I think Conor Lamb would have beaten Dr. Oz like –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: If Dr. Oz hadn't used the word "crudites" would that have made a – would that have made a big difference?

MR. ALLEN: Or talked about the Steelers game on a bye week.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So today you would expect no major legislation to actually go through in the next two years, other than appropriation bills and the debt limit. There's nothing the Democrats can get through the House, probably, and Republicans can't get anything through the Senate. So –

MS. KILLION: Well, again, I think that's what makes the lame duck, to Kasie's point, I think so critical. I mean, there's also the Electoral Count Act, you know, reforming that. That was a big bipartisan effort right before the election, just to ensure that what happened on January 6th doesn't happen again in terms of defining the role of Congress and defining the role of the vice president more clearly. And again, I think we have to watch the same-sex marriage bill. We know that Leader Schumer just teed up, I think, a cloture vote, or procedural vote on it for later this week. I don't know when that final vote could be but, again, that's another bipartisan effort that we have seen from the Senate. So, if anything, maybe there's hope in the lame duck, if not for the next few years coming up.

MR. BAIER: But I will say that with margins so tight that if you had a compromise bill on any big issue, you could swing, you know, 10 votes and move legislation. So, if you go around the edges on immigration, if you have some economic bill that you could get, you know, 10 Democrats to vote with Republicans, or vice versa in the Senate.

MR. COOK: Nothing will go through a lame duck that isn't OK with Mitch McConnell.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what do you think will happen in this lame duck of any consequence? Do you think something is going to get done in the lame duck, other than debt limits or things like that?

MR. BAIER: Well, I said same sex marriage. I think they've got the votes on the Republican side.

MR. COOK: Defense authorization, maybe?



MS. KILLION: Again, the Electoral Count Act. I know the senators who are involved in that would like to get that done before the end of the year.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And we haven't mentioned that much the –

MS. KILLION: And Ukraine funding, I would say too. I think that's another big priority, I think, in the lame duck, as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: For a while, the Democrats were being criticized for emphasizing the abortion issue too much in the campaign, but maybe that didn't hurt them. Do you think that helped or hurt them in the election? The abortion issue, the overturning –

MR. COOK: It clearly was a bigger effect than I thought. Economy inflation less, abortion more.

MR. ALLEN: Democracy more.

MR. COOK: Right. But I think just having lousy Republican candidates in a couple dozen key House and Senate and gubernatorial races made more difference than that.

MS. HUNT: Yeah. But the abortion issue – I mean, this is something – I'm sort of fascinated by this. Because we've gotten so used to covering it and thinking about it in a – in a Roe versus Wade context, in a world in which the Supreme Court has set rules that are, you know, not breakable. It sets a political landscape for activists on the right who were some of the most persistent and motivated, you know, activists, but also, like, mobilizers of voters, right? If you look at the numbers in terms of Republican voters who were motivated to vote by the abortion issue this time versus the last midterm election, it has literally flipped on its head.

Something like 75 percent of Democrats say abortion motivated them. That number used to be Republicans who were showing up. And that's the thing that I think a lot of Republicans are trying to figure out in real time, because they went from being the people who could very easily caricature Democrats as extreme on abortion by saying they don't support any restrictions – which is not where the public is. The public will support a certain number of restrictions at a certain point. But instead, because of, A, the way the Alito opinion was written and B, because of what some of these red states are doing in terms of no exceptions or limited exceptions –

MR. BAIER: But I think that's going to change. I think you're going to see more and more Republican state legislatures say: There's no longer the umbrella of Roe v. Wade. They went very conservative and banned everything, and now they're going to come back and say there will be exceptions for rape and incest. And they will set the political table in these state legislatures.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, when you interview a member of Congress on your show, what percentage of the time do you think they're telling you the truth? [Laughter.] A hundred percent? Ninety percent? Eighty percent?

MR. BAIER: It's definitely right around 50 [percent]. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, what about you? What percentage is it?

MR. BAIER: It depends on the person a lot.

MS. HUNT: Yeah. It depends on the person, yeah. I mean, honestly the toughest part about covering Congress is figuring out who's telling me the truth more than 50 percent of the time. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Mike, of all the people you have covered in the years you've been at Politico, and Washington Post, and Axios, who's the most impressive political figure you've ever interviewed? Anybody you'd say, this person should be president, or this person's too good to be president?

MR. ALLEN: Senator Obama. Senator Obama, you knew he was going places.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Really? OK. And, Charlie, who was the most impressive political figure you've ever met?

MR. COOK: Gosh, why didn't you ask least? Wow. I'm going to have to work on that one.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Must be a – it's a long list or a short list? You can't decide?

MR. COOK: It's really short, because every time I start to come up with somebody I think of exceptions, or I think it depended upon when you were talking to them. And there are people that I've thought, yeah, this person may be president one day. And, you know, one of them went to jail. [Laughter.] So, you know.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But there are 75 members of the House who live in their offices because they can't afford another house, I guess, in Washington. If they raised their salary, maybe they could afford it. Is there any chance that Congress will raise their salaries?

MS. KILLION: I think that's a good question. I think what's interesting is this whole unionization movement that we've seen in Congress, or this – I mean, over the past year or so. Because it's also just the rank-and-file staff, right? [Laughs.] I mean, they're having to work multiple jobs. They, you know, have been under a lot of stress because of what happened with January 6th and COVID. So, I think that was a big step forward, just to even increase the base pay. I think now it's to \$45,000 a year. So possibly. I don't know that it's, you know, maybe one of the items on the agenda. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So –

MR. COOK: John Dingell had a great solution. Every candidate for Congress ought to – or every member of Congress should put how much they want to make – can set their own salary that would be on the ballot next to their names. And let voters decide whether they're worth it or not – a free market approach.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, let me tell you one final story about congressional salaries. So, you all probably know that the 27th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is the so-called Madison Amendment. It was actually in the original Bill of Rights – the original Bill of Rights that went out to the states actually had 12 bills – 12 amendments to the Constitution. We ratified – the states ratified 10. But one of those original 12, which was not ratified, was the one that said:

Members of Congress cannot pass a – cannot get a salary increase until after the next election. The theory was, if members of Congress want to increase their salary, they should at least face the voters before that goes into effect. And that was voted down by the states. Now, why was that? Well, the reason is they thought that members of Congress should never get a salary increase. And that's why they voted it down. But actually, now we have the 27th Amendment.

I'd like to thank our panel for a very interesting conversation. I appreciate your doing it. I have a prize.

MR. COOK: Thank you, David.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. We have a very heavy prize or award. Thank you. A token of our esteem.

MS. KILLION: Thank you.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thank you.

MR. BAIER: Ah, thank you very much.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Very heavy. Careful.

MS. HUNT: Wow, thank you, David.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thank you.

MS. HUNT: Don't drop it. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Yeah.

MR. ALLEN: Thank you for having me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. OK. Thank you all. Thank you all.

MR. COOK: That's gorgeous.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thanks a lot.

MR. ALLEN: Thank you for a great conversation.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thank you.



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