

THE ECONOMIC CLUB

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

**Excerpts from the Signature Event featuring 2016 Election Panel:
Mike Allen, Politico; Gloria Borger, CNN; Charlie Cook, The Cook
Political Report; and Chris Wallace, FOX News Sunday**

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MS. BORGER: I do [*think that Donald Trump can win the election*]. I think that this race, if nothing else, has been volatile with swings. And there are a fewer number of persuadable voters left, of course – some people say 6 percent, 7 percent; I'd say the number is probably smaller than that. But I do believe that Donald Trump right now is doing something we haven't seen before, which is he's staying on message. He has a simple message about Hillary Clinton. He's given his Republican candidates something they can cheerfully talk about, which is running against Hillary Clinton. So, for the first time in this campaign, they're singing from the same songbook here. And that will help him. Will it be enough? Does Hillary Clinton have some built-in advantages in this Electoral College? Yes, she does. He's got to find blue states to flip, and he's looking for them. And he's looking in states like Wisconsin, he's looking in states like Michigan. And we don't – you know, at this point, overnight – as Howard Baker used to say, overnight is a lifetime in politics. And I believe in this race more than any other that is true....

MR. COOK: Can, yes. I think because both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have such enormous negatives that each one has, in effect, a high floor, low ceiling, which keeps sort of anything possible. But I think there's a better chance of Hillary Clinton hitting 300 than Donald Trump hitting 270.

MR. COOK: . . . the first part of last week [*before the announcement by FBI Director Comey last Friday that the FBI had discovered and was going to review additional emails sent through Clinton's private server*], it looked like the bottom was starting to fall out for a lot of House and Senate Republican candidates. And then I think it kind of firmed back up, kind of came back a little bit, and then Friday threw everything up in the air. So that now, I think it is possible for Donald Trump to win, but I think it's still pretty hard. I think things have changed a lot less in the last week than the conventional wisdom is.

MR. ALLEN: . . . the biggest change is that it gave new wind to Republican Senate candidates; until then, the first question that any Republican Senate candidate was asked wherever they went was about Donald Trump. Now it's not, and that's a tremendous advantage for them.

MS. BORGER: . . . One thing that I'm really looking at is this question of enthusiasm among Clinton supporters, because we had seen before Comey that the enthusiasm – Donald Trump's voters had always been more enthusiastic about voting for him than Hillary Clinton voters were about voting for her. That number was starting to sort of equal out towards, you know, last week. And then came Comey. And then what you saw in some of the tracking polling – and I try not to look too much at daily tracking polling because it gives me anxiety for these things to shift 10 points in a day, which they do very often; they're not very dependable. But you do see over a period of time now, which is days, that her enthusiasm numbers tend to be shifting down. So the question that I then ask is, will that mean that some voters will stay home who say a pox on both your houses? So will that suppress her turnout? And will it make his turnout be more enthusiastic? I mean, we don't know the answer to that, but I think we ought to be looking at it.

MR. WALLACE: I still think . . . that she has an easier path to 270 than he does. . . . But it is changed. And you look at the polls where he was behind by eight to 10 points, he's now behind by three to four – or, in some places where he was behind by two to three, he's now actually leading by a couple. And you've got the ABC tracking poll, which yesterday showed him with a

one-point lead and today showed it as a flat-footed tie at 46-46. And I will say from my experience covering politics for mmm years that there's nothing that can move faster than a political campaign where the tide is changing.

MR. WALLACE: Florida is going to be a big indicator. If Trump loses Florida . . . it's over. There's no way he gets to 270 losing the 29 electoral votes in Florida. On the other hand, if he wins Florida, we could be headed for a significant night.

MS. BORGER: . . . I'm going to look at Wisconsin, which . . . Trump say[s] he believes it's in play.

MR. WALLACE: Can I just give you one data point? . . . it's my favorite statistic. And this tells you why we all are talking about Hillary having so much of an advantage just built in structurally in the electoral map. If you go back and look, there are 18 states and the District of Columbia which have voted six elections in a row for the Democrat, all the way back from '92 through Clinton's two elections, Bush's two elections, and Obama's two elections. Six times in a row voted Democrat. They have 242 electoral votes, which means if she just holds on to what has voted Democrat every time since '92, she only needs 28 more electoral votes to win. Flip it to the Republicans: 13 states have voted Republican six elections in a row, 102 electoral votes. So she starts off with this enormous advantage. That doesn't include states like Florida or Ohio or North Carolina or Virginia or a variety of states that have voted. But she starts off with this huge structural advantage of 242 electoral votes.

MS. BORGER: We have new polling out today which shows Trump up in Nevada 49 percent to 43 percent and up in Arizona 49 percent to 44 percent, Clinton up in Pennsylvania only by four points. She's been up in Pennsylvania by double digits. And Florida, as Chris was saying, is almost a dead heat, as Florida always is, 49-47 Clinton.

MR. ALLEN: . . . sort of a glass-is-half-full view for Clinton voters is now they're nervous and you won't have the complacency that you did. But the turnout can flip both ways. . . . one thing that makes Republicans nervous is – that is discussed about the emails, the investigations – is the voter that then stays home a suburban, exurban, more-educated, higher-income voter? That exact voter would be Hillary Clinton and Roy Blunt. That voter would be a ticket-splitter. It would be Hillary Clinton and Kelly Ayotte in New Hampshire. So there's some worry about that. And that's why, even though there's the blue wall that Chris was talking about, that there's so much more nervousness in Brooklyn [*Clinton campaign headquarters*] and among Clinton voters.

MR. ALLEN: . . . Tim Kaine was so perfect [*as a Vice Presidential choice*], and it was because he was a governing choice. It happened that he brought Virginia with him, which was very handy. But Secretary Clinton, who has seen the Vice Presidency up so close so many 12 times, [*made*] a governing pick, somebody who will be very effective once they get the job.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: If the election were over tomorrow – and let's suppose for the purpose of this that Hillary Clinton wins – what would you say would be the turning point for her, as you look back over the last year, to have won this election?

MS. BORGER: I would say that first debate.

MR. COOK: I'd say exactly the same thing.

MR. WALLACE: I'd say the nomination of Donald Trump.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Suppose Donald Trump were to win the election. What would you say was the turning point for him?

MR. WALLACE: I could be a smartass and say the nomination of Hillary Clinton, which might actually be true. And certainly the Comey announcement.

MS. BORGER: Yeah. I would say that, yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Who is her [*Clinton's*] most effective surrogate?

MR. WALLACE: Michelle.

MS. BORGER: Michelle Obama.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And who's Trump's most effective surrogate?

MS. BORGER: Mike Pence. And a day or so ago, they were together somewhere.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Let's suppose for a moment Hillary Clinton wins. Who would be the presumptive lead candidate for the Republicans in 2020? Would somebody be the lead? Would it be Pence? Would it be Cruz?

MR. ALLEN: . . . It's going to be somebody who was not involved in this mess. I think the people who have been are so badly splattered. So I would rather be Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas. I would rather be Senator Ben Sasse. I would rather be the Governor of South Carolina, Nikki Haley. I'd rather be somebody who was not in the middle of this.

MR. COOK: I would eventually want to be somebody that wasn't, but I think just off the blocks you'd probably say Pence, or I would say Pence. But in the end, you may very well be right.

MS. BORGER: The question is, what has all of this done for Paul Ryan? This is a big question for Republicans out there. I think that you have the Speaker of the House, who eventually endorsed the candidate but cannot say his name. He talks about Trump as the nominee and he has a very difficult time.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And let's suppose it's the opposite. Let's suppose Trump wins. So who is the leader of the Democratic Party going forward?

MR. WALLACE: That's a good question. And one of the reasons that you didn't have much of a primary race on the Democratic side is there is not a deep bench. There were a lot of credible

Republicans running this time. . . . You could say Andrew Cuomo or something like that, but there are not a bunch of names that spring to mind.

MR. COOK: Well, presidentially I don't know, but I'd say Schumer is going to come out of this as the presumptive leader of the party.

MR. COOK: . . . I think Paul Ryan's got to make a decision from the get-go – does he want to be a part of governing or does he want to run for the Republican nomination? I think he's going to decide to govern. I think the Senate will be more functional with a Mitch McConnell-Chuck Schumer relationship as opposed to with Harry Reid. But on the Republican side, House Republicans have to decide, do they want to legislate or do they want to investigate? I think at least half of them are going to want to investigate, and Ryan would rather legislate.

MR. COOK: I think the media could not do a worse job than this year. I mean, I really believe that. I think early on basically cable news handed over their airwaves to Trump and then begrudgingly added Bernie and Hillary. So they gave him a free ride for a long time, and maybe were not as aggressive in holding his feet to the fire during the primaries and during the debates as they should have. But then the last month or so it's like watching a badly refereed basketball game where we're seeing makeup calls and we're seeing particularly print going – and I'm not a Trump defender at all – but going after Trump in ways that I think violate every canon of ethics for news reporting.

MR. WALLACE: I completely agree with that. If you read the adjectives – just look at the adjectives in the news stories in The New York Times or the Washington Post. You know, one I think today talked about Trump “lurching” into something. They just use – well, that's a verb. They use adjectives and verbs in a very prejudicial way.

MS. BORGES: We can all debate the role of the media, and we will. And I think we all need some time to get through this election and then take a look back at it, which I think would be really useful. The one thing I will say about Donald Trump, which I think is a lesson to a lot of people running for office, which is if you make yourself available to the press, the press will interview you. And I recall during the primaries, would Jeb Bush talk to us frequently? The answer is no, because he was behaving like the front-runner who didn't have to speak to the media. I mean, you all know this because you're booking people on shows and you – and the thing that Donald Trump did, which served to his advantage – and this is not to say the press didn't do things that were wrong – but he put himself out there and talked to people.

MR. ALLEN: And he was interesting.

MR. COOK: . . . I think you could have given every other candidate infusions of sodium pentothal and — and they – and many of them would not have gotten coverage. I think this was about ratings and it was about who was going to – you know, people giving – allowing him to do phone-in. You couldn't phone in, you know, these shows before.

MR. WALLACE: Some of us didn't allow him to phone in.

[Control of the Senate]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: . . . what do you think is the likelihood the Democrats will control the Senate?

MR. ALLEN: Majority Leader Schumer, who's been prepared for that since I think he was like four. I agree with my colleagues here that until a week ago that seemed very, very likely. And now that's not the case. It's completely on the cusp. . . . *[It's]* very possible that there could be a 50-50 Senate where the tie is broken by a Vice President Kaine or a Vice President Pence.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Let's go down state by state, all right? New Hampshire. Who's going to win New Hampshire, the Senate seat?

MR. COOK: Flip it up in the air. It's that close. It's within a point.

MR. WALLACE: Talk to him. He knows.

MS. BORGER: Talk to Charlie. He's the expert.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. . . . Pennsylvania.

MR. COOK: McGinty up a couple points. Toomey's run a great campaign. . . . He's a great candidate. He's a better candidate. But Pennsylvania, it's not Illinois or Wisconsin, but it's a tough state.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What about Florida?

MR. COOK: It's a Rubio win by four points, five points.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Nevada.

MR. COOK: A week and a half ago I would have said Joe Heck, the Republican. Now maybe not.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: North Carolina.

MS. BORGER: It's hard.

MR. COOK: That's the one that Republicans are very frustrated with because remember, you know, the old record players that get 78 RPMs and then there are 45 and then there are 33, and then there's 17 ½. And that's Richard Burr. The slow to organize, slow to raise money, slow to define his – he's doing it the way he's always done it. And Republicans want to pull their hair out over him.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What about Missouri?

MS. BORGER: That's a tough one.

MR. COOK: That's a tough one. And that's where Trump is working against – somebody said Trump was running against Evan Bayh in Indiana and against Roy Blunt in Missouri, the whole anti-Washington –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What about Indiana?

MR. COOK: I think Bayh holds on, but it'll be close.

MR. ALLEN: one theme of Charlie's answer is we see there that, absent the top of the ticket, the Republicans would easily have a return of the majority.

MS. BORGER: One other thing to add on that, and it applies to House races. But I've never seen a presidential race where you don't have on a stage all the candidates that are running when the President – when the presidential nominee comes to town and they're all holding their hands up together and saying let's vote for this ticket, you know, with our presidential nominee at the top, and let's support Kelly Ayotte and let's support –

MR. ALLEN: They want Pence to host it.

MS. BORGER: And they're doing that with Mike Pence to a degree. But you don't have that picture in this race.

MR. COOK: . . . one thing that's worth noting is our Senate editor, Jennifer Duffy, has noted a lot of times that when you get down to the last handful of races, the ones that are toss-ups, they never split down the middle; that they overwhelmingly go one way or the other. It's just whatever that last gust of wind pushes the ones that are right on the knife edge one way or the other.

[Control of the House of Representatives]

MR. COOK: The Democrats need 30 seats.

MS. BORGER: Thirty seats.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What do you think is the likely outcome in the House?

MR. COOK: Republicans lose 13, 14, 15 seats.

MR. ALLEN: But over the last few weeks it's *[changed]* – it was five to 10, 10 to 15. A few weeks ago there was a worry of losing 20. Now I think people have dialed back from that. But either way you're going to have a weakened Paul Ryan because the Republicans who will lose are Ryan-ish Republicans, the more moderate ones.

[Analysis of the Primary Campaign]

MR. COOK: . . . to me the turning point [*in the Republican primary campaign*] was right after Wisconsin, just before the Acela primary. That was the time when Ted Cruz still had a real chance of beating him. And why they didn't drop the hammer on – I mean, I don't think they would have found all these women, but they could have found enough stuff that I think would have kneecapped him.

MR. ALLEN: Yeah, David, two things [*reasons why Republican presidential primary candidates did not attack Trump aggressively during the campaign*]. One, there was a failure of imagination. Like so many people in this room – maybe on this stage – they didn't think that they had to kill him. This is the idea of you need to drop an anvil on their neck. They couldn't give him oxygen. But the second thing is . . . they were just afraid. None of them wanted him to go after them. I did an interview with Newt Gingrich the other day for – a series, "Open Mike." I did a video interview with Newt, and he said that in a debate Donald Trump is like the bear in "Revenant." And I [*say*], so he will get you and so Rubio – Marco Rubio is Leonardo DiCaprio? And [*Gingrich responds*], yes, exactly. They just didn't want to go up against the bear.

MR. COOK: Well, but . . . you could send an unmarked envelope to The New York Times or to any of these – you don't have to have your fingerprints on it.

MS. BORGER: Right. But they were too busy attacking each other. There were some debates, you recall, where the incoming was flying over Donald Trump's head because they were too busy attacking each other.

MR. WALLACE: I don't think he [*Bernie Sanders*] would have won. . . . I just wonder, in the end, whether a 74-year-old independent socialist from Vermont was ever going to beat Hillary Clinton.

[*Polling*]

MR. COOK: The good – the better pollsters – all the national name-brand pollsters, they're calling a mix that could be as much as half cellphones. So the problem is caller ID. It's response rates. You know, a generation ago somebody calls you up and asks your opinion about politics, and you felt empowered and flattered. Today, it's who's interrupting my dinner. But the thing is, and the way I would look at it is, a live person calling is always better than an online or a robocall, and a standalone poll is always better than a tracking poll because they could do the three, four callbacks over a couple of days to try to get the primary person. But the problem . . . the problem with the averages is it's turned polls into a commodity and it treats them all alike. And all these polls are not alike. Some of these are junk. Some of these I have to look up . . . go on their website and see who in the hell is this pollster.

MS. BORGER: We look at the exit polls. They give you an indication on how certain questions are being answered. But we don't really know the outcome. I remember when John Kerry ran and the exit polls were wrong at 4:00 in the afternoon.

MR. COOK: Exit polls are not that accurate.

