

THE ECONOMIC CLUB

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

Charlie Cook, Editor and Publisher, *The Cook Political Report*, and Political Analyst, the National Journal Group and NBC News, joined Economic Club Vice President of Programs, Brian Kelly, for a conversation about the Democratic primaries and the 2020 presidential election.

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Editor and Publisher, *The Cook Political Report*
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BRIAN KELLY: Welcome to The Economic Club's first virtual event. I'm Brian Kelly. I'm the vice president of programs for the club, and the editorial director of *U.S. News & World Report*. We have chosen this format, as many of you are aware, because gatherings are not the best place to be these days. But we're very conscious of the health and wellbeing of our members. And at the same time, we want to continue to find ways to provide interesting programming and put interesting people in front of our members.

So I want to first thank our guest, Charlie Cook, who I will introduce more formally, for being willing to come on board and sit here in the offices of the Economic Club and do what he would have done in front of a nice, big luncheon gathering. So, get your own sandwich, but we're going to –

CHARLIE COOK: Failing to your being able to get an interesting person, I was the backup plan.

MR. KELLY: No, Charlie, as you all know, is really one of our favorite political prognosticators and guests at The Economic Club. And we have him back as often as we can to take a sounding. So, we will get to that.

MR. COOK: And member.

MR. KELLY: And member, of course. There you go.

But just a short commercial on this same point: This Friday the 13th, beginning at 9:00 a.m., Economic Club President David Rubenstein will interview a series of top local CEOs to discuss how their companies are managing and implementing changes to continue doing business in the current environment. So, watch your inbox for more details on that. So, we will be looking at some livestreaming going down the road, but obviously too we can archive these programs on the website, so keep in touch on that.

So, I know everyone wants to hear from Charlie. Quite an interesting season in politics, and even in the last 24 hours. As many of you know, Charlie is the editor, publisher, founder of *The Cook Political Report*, one of the most authoritative guides to American politics. He's also a political analyst for The National Journal Group and NBC News.

So, Charlie, welcome. Thank you. I'll start right in. Primary last night. That was quick. It's over, huh? We're done?

MR. COOK: You know, it's fascinating that if Bernie Sanders got in this race February of last year and Joe Biden towards the end of April. So if on May 1st of last year, you know, you told somebody: It's going to come down to Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders, the same two people that led in the polls then, and that Joe Biden would end up as the nominee you would say: Oh, well. Ho-hum. I guess nothing happened. And so, what we thought, a lot of us thought, would happen happened, just not when or how. And no, this is the most convoluted thing I've ever seen. I mean, Bernie Sanders back in October, you know, Elizabeth Warren it looked like she had an

excellent chance to be the nominee. He looked like he was roadkill. Joe Biden was roadkill, what, two weeks ago, you know, coming in fourth in Iowa, fifth in New Hampshire, and end up in – and, you know, the question is, does Sanders drop out before the Sunday debate or after the Sunday debate.

MR. KELLY: Right.

MR. COOK: You know, put a fork in it. This thing's done.

MR. KELLY: Yeah. So, what did happen? I mean, it's head-snapping, as you say. But when you dig into the numbers and the analysis, what – was it, you know, South Carolina and the Black vote? Was that everything? Or was there a lot of underlying things that that set in motion?

MR. COOK: You know, I passionately believe in data. But sometimes I think instincts probably work just as well. Democrats came out of the 2016 election absolutely traumatized. I mean, they thought they were up against the easiest Republican opponent since Barry Goldwater in '64. And then on election night, in this weird election, you know all the numbers, 78,000 votes in three states, two-tenths of a point in Michigan, 7/10ths of a point in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. And we had this inverted election that we had gone from – prior from 2000, 1888 was the last time we had a split between the electoral college and the popular vote, until 2000.

And we'd had a lot of close races. 1948, Truman-Dewey. 1960, Kennedy-Nixon. '68, Nixon-Humphrey-Wallace. '76, Carter-Ford. '92, Clinton-George H.W. Bush. But the electoral vote and the popular vote always went the same way. And then we had 2000. And we all thought, wow, you know, it was just sort of a statistical fluke. I mean, you know, thought nothing of it. And then sixteen years later it happens again. And now I think we're a lot more cognizant that, you know, Republican votes are just more efficiently allocated around the country than Democratic votes are.

When Hillary Clinton wins California by 4 million votes, wins New York state by a million, Illinois by 700,000. Texas is the biggest state that Republicans win by a big margin – you know, like 200,000. Plus, you have all the small states, where you get three electoral votes no matter what. So, but Democrats came out of that traumatized. And they were – and particularly they were united in their opposition to President Trump. I mean when you see 85-90 percent of Republicans approve the job President Trump's doing. And between 5 and 8, 5 and 9 percent of Democrats. And, you know, probably half of those are hard of hearing and didn't get the question right. So, Democrats were unified on that.

But they were divided in terms of about 60 percent of Democrats just wanted to hit the reset button. They just wanted to restore things to where things were before Donald Trump came along; before he won the presidency. And whether it was going to where Bill Clinton was ideologically, or Obama, or two notches to the left of Obama. But any of those things were OK. And but the key thing was they just wanted to nominate somebody that would win. And they all had preferences, but at the end of the day, they just want to win.

And so that was the 60 percent. And then the 40 percent wanted big fundamental change. And that was sort of the Bernie-Elizabeth Warren side. But I think for the 60, you know, having 28 candidates, and roughly a dozen and a half were credible people from the establishment wing, I think the perfect became the enemy of the good. They kept looking for the perfect Democrat. Well, Joe Biden's too old. Pete Buttigieg, you know, he's 38. He ought to be 48. Looks 28. You know, I mean, and they went through, well, you know, some Democrats were – you know, well, maybe Hillary Clinton lost because she was a woman. Maybe, maybe. So maybe, you know, even – I know pollsters that did focus groups of women Democrats, you know, found there were a slice of women that passionately wanted a woman president but thought, you know what? Maybe this is not the year to try that.

Minority votes. Democrats are clearly willing to nominate minority, but Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, Deval Patrick, Julian Castro never scratched the surface. You know, but they kept coming up with reasons why not to center – not to go with any one. And with Biden I think the establishment, they all knew him. Almost all of them liked him. You know, but there was not any – there was not the confidence that he could get it done. Maybe he's too old. Maybe he's lost his fastball. Not – hasn't always been that dexterous, you know, in terms of verbally. And so, they were holding back. And you ended up having Sanders dominating over Warren, Warren fading. So, he's consolidating the left lane.

And the establishment lane in the end was split four ways. You know, Biden, Buttigieg, Klobuchar, Bloomberg. And suddenly, I think the establishment wing realized that given the weird rules that Democrats had, that Bernie was on the verge of – he was going to put this thing away. I mean, he could get 20-25 percent of the vote on Super Tuesday and the establishment vote split four ways, and he'd end up with 40-45 percent of the delegates. And you can't catch up at that point.

So, I think it was a realization that, wow, Bernie Sanders may be about to win this nomination and, at least among this 60 percent over here, that was just unacceptable. So, it happened.

MR. KELLY: Yeah. And interesting. I mean, we've talked before, you know, in the old days you'd have a problem like this, and the brokers would come in. You know, the Richard Daleys and the Frank Hauges, whoever the Democrats had to make a deal. This was spontaneous, right? This was like a cascade of people coming to the conclusions that you just articulated.

MR. COOK: It was. That's why I always objected when people would use the term "brokered convention," because we don't have brokers anymore. I mean, you have an open convention, contested, but not brokers. And you know, I'm old fashioned, I think things worked better when we did have brokers. But yeah, it was pretty spontaneous. I mean, it – there was just – there was just a feeling that maybe you couldn't say that Bernie couldn't possibly win, but that – [coughs] – excuse me – if Bernie Sanders won, it meant that a Democrat was going to win period. And that they – fears of potentially losing the House, losing out on any chance of winning majority in the Senate. But I think it was spontaneous. It was not – it was not organized.

MR. KELLY: You've also seen that some of the air went out of Bernie's balloon. His supporters, which had been pretty energized – I mean, if you look at some of the numbers last night, they just didn't show up, especially in the Midwest, Missouri, Michigan. They didn't show up. Is that – what do you attribute that to?

MR. COOK: Well, I wonder whether they just sort of realized this isn't going to happen. I mean, the fascinating thing to me is his supporters have been so intense – I mean, the guy has a heart attack and it wasn't even a hiccup. I mean, his numbers never fluctuated at all. And I think they just suddenly sensed that, you know, the man's not going to let this happen.

MR. KELLY: Right. Right.

MR. COOK: You know? The establishment is not going to let him, you know.

MR. KELLY: Yeah.

MR. COOK: And –

MR. KELLY: I guess we'll see the numbers as they sort out, but I saw he was critical of the young folks. He was saying, you know, young people didn't turn out for me.

MR. COOK: Well, you and I are the same age. In 1972, first year that 18-year-olds had the right to vote, and a lot of guys were getting shipped off to Vietnam. And you know what? For all the demonstrations, young people didn't vote then. And people under 30 have never voted in real numbers, ever. And so, this isn't an indictment of this generation, it's just an age group that has never voted in big numbers. And you look at – CNN did an analysis of all their exit polls from 2016. Sixty percent of Democratic voters in the primaries – all of them combined – 60 percent were 45 years of age or older. So, some of this – I mean, young people, they have a lot of passion, and energy, and they're visible, and they get – but as a segment of the electorate, it's not as big as people think.

MR. KELLY: Don't take them to the bank.

MR. COOK: Yeah.

MR. KELLY: I was interested in Michigan last night, and I know it's early, we're still sorting through this, but there were pretty good turnout numbers for Biden. And if you project ahead into the general election, Michigan's a pretty important state. Do you see that? Are you seeing more energy among just the sort of – the more mainstream, moderate Democrats?

MR. COOK: When you just step back and look at them as a total, yes. You're always going to have little fluctuations. And you have some states that, you know, were caucuses four years ago. And my guess is we will not have any caucuses in 2024. But yeah, we're seeing a lot of that. But in Michigan, though, there was virtually no Clinton campaign in Michigan, or Wisconsin. I remember when the Trump campaign started talking about targeting Michigan and Wisconsin, everybody laughed because Michigan had gone Democratic six times in a row. Michael Dukakis

was the last Democratic presidential candidate to lose Michigan. Pennsylvania, six times in a row. Wisconsin, seven times in a row, Mondale in '84. And it just – they just – and, as you know, you know, Hillary Clinton didn't even step foot in the state of Wisconsin between Labor Day and Election Day because they thought they had it in the bag.

And to their credit, I mean, because there was a lot of things – I mean, sometimes it's better to be lucky than good. And the Trump people were lucky in a lot of things, but they were good on targeting those two states, targeting central Pennsylvania, doing the digital, social media pace, and I think Kellyanne Conway convincing their candidate to say fewer exotic things in the last three weeks before the election. [Laughter.] So, but Michigan – you know, it will be interesting to see what – how Democrats do when they actually have a campaign in Michigan.

MR. KELLY: Yeah, yeah. I want to come back to those states. Exotic things, yes, that's – we've got some questions from members that have come in. So, I want to turn to some of those. Kyle, can you – what's – so we'll let – yeah.

We touched the young liberal voters. And that raises this bigger question: Where do these Sanders voters go? He still has a basket of delegates. He's going to come into the convention with something. Does he want something? Do his supporters want something? How – you know, is there still a civil war within the Democratic Party?

MR. COOK: The exit polls didn't ask this in 2016, but the Cooperative Congressional Elections – anyway, the big huge, more academic poll found that 12 percent of all the voters – people that supported Bernie Sanders for the nomination in 2016 – voted for Donald Trump, 12 percent. Now, I have no idea what percentage of people that supported Sanders just didn't vote. My guess is it was probably, you know, bigger than that. That was always going to happen.

For the establishment, this is actually about as good as they could ask, because the worst-case scenario for the establishment would be Sanders rolls it up in Super Tuesday, he comes out of the last primaries with, you know, 40 percent, give or take, of all the delegates, in first place, but not 50. And that was the Milwaukee gets burned to the ground scenario. And but, you know, to the extent it was the establishment doing things to deny Sanders the nomination would have been pretty nasty.

And while you can say that in effect happened, but it was just as much, as you suggest, sort of Sanders – they just kind of ran out of gas at the same time. I mean, it was – you know, it was really interesting. I mean, it wasn't like the insiders did him in. So, there will be some of that. But the other question, though, is to what extent will having a more center-left, establishment pull people over that wouldn't have? So, there's a – there's always a push-pull.

MR. KELLY: Yeah. You see Biden, I mean, it was interesting, his speech – his victory speech, we need to get back to decency. You know, it was a sort of return to normalcy. I mean, is this like Calvin Coolidge again where, you know, he's just going to play it – he was so modulated in his tone. There was, you know, no banging, shouting, reading off the teleprompter. A bit of a different Joe Biden, but also a very calm, down the middle Biden. What does that do for the disaffected voters, as you say? The folks who are unhappy?

MR. COOK: Yeah, the question – yeah. Does time heal all wounds? And does the animosity towards President Trump, to what extent does that motivate in the end of the day those Sanders people? And you know, there's going to be – there's definitely going to be leakage, no question about it, of Sanders people that either won't vote or will vote to a third-party candidate, or something. But you know, for the establishment types, there were a lot worse things that could have happened, even with Biden or another establishment candidate coming out on top, because Sanders being in first place but not getting the nomination would have – that was a blood on the floor of the convention hall situation. And they avoided that.

MR. KELLY: Yeah, all us political reporters – former political reporters – hate that. You know, we're dying for a brokered convention. Not going to happen. So, let's look at a couple more questions.

So, Trump – well, you know, the elephant in the room right now is the coronavirus, and Trump's handling of that. The question, how has Trump's handling of the coronavirus impacted his favorability? Do you think the virus will impact the election?

MR. COOK: You know, the – when was his first public comments? Was that a week, 10 days ago maybe? And you know, I don't think anybody could argue – he did not cover himself with glory there. But the fact is, we've had very little polling since then. And so, we don't know the answer to that. But you know, I wouldn't be surprised if it didn't ding him a little bit. But keep in mind, his numbers have been almost impervious to events, positive or negative. We're six consecutive months of 50-year low unemployment and his numbers, if they went up at all, barely. Allegations of things that look pretty devastating, numbers went up.

I mean, normally in the first three years a president has a between 20- and 25-point margin between their high and their low. And for President Trump, in the Gallup poll, up until January it was 11 points. And both Fox and CNN, 10 points between his high and his low. NBC/Wall Street Journal was nine. I think ABC/Washington Post was eight. I mean, he had a very narrow trading range. And events just didn't move him up or down. And if you think about it, the people that like and approve the job he's doing now are pretty much the same people that did at the beginning. And the people that disapprove and dislike him now are pretty much the same people. I mean, very few people have moved.

And that roughly 75-80 percent of voters either strongly approve or strongly disapprove, there's just not a lot of ambivalence there. And so, I think that's why when the economy was growing and looking good it didn't help him, just because too many voters were baked in the cake. And if this or the economy goes down, some – I think it would hurt him less than it would hurt others. But you're still taking about the first president in, you know, the 75 years that we've had polling of never having had a 50 percent job approval rating in any major national poll. He's been what they call underwater or upside down, with a higher disapproval than approval, in 403 out of the 405 polls – major national polls taken since he took office. I mean, nobody's ever – I mean, that's never happened before.

So you know, I don't – I don't know that in this hyper partisan political tribalism period we have, the losing 49 states or the having a job approval – Jimmy Carter dropped down to 29

percent at one point – I don't think that can – I don't think a president's going to get extremely high or extremely low given the partisanship that we have today.

MR. KELLY: So, a bit of a different rulebook. But and – but also, going back, you know, the margins were so slim in a few key states. Where are you on the key state box? You know, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin? What do you think?

MR. COOK: Well, I guess it would depend on how many states did you – would you give me to be able to put in the tightest category? I mean, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania. Obviously, those are the three states that effectively decide the election. To me, that's sort of the frost belt of the – the frost belt of the swing states. We have just come out, *The Cook Report*, our new ratings on Monday. We've got those three as toss-ups, and the other three are Arizona, North Carolina, and Florida. And where Florida is a perennial. North Carolina was kind of on the bubble. Arizona back a little bit. But I think it's going to be those six.

And the interesting thing is that in Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, you have a disproportionate number of whites with less – white voters with less than a four-year college degree. Decent number of whites, small town, rural, and whites with less than a college degree who were in industrial manufacturing areas, which is where Democrats have had problems. But where they're doing better, much better, is places with fast-growing middle- and upper-class suburbs. You know, like Arizona, North Carolina. You know that sort of thing. I mean, that's where Democrats got their majority in the House back in 2018. It was in suburbs of Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, Richmond, Virginia. And that was just the South.

Districts that hadn't gone Republican – hadn't gone Democrat since Moby Dick was a guppy. And there they were. So, we're seeing this realignment, with certain groups moving away from Democrats, towards Republicans, and another group moving away from Republicans towards Democrats.

MR. KELLY: Yeah. So, what does that tell you about House-Senate, the other, you know, big issue here that's coming up?

MR. COOK: Yeah. I think the House – there was not much – I mean, we have a – our model shows Republicans picking up about six seats. They need 18. And when you lose 40 seats, you're going to pick some up in the next election. And when you consider there are like 30, exactly, Republican seats – or, excuse me – Democratic seats up in states that Trump carried, Republicans are going to gain some seats. But when you look at the money that's come in, you look at other things, it was pretty unlikely, unless you just had a meltdown at the top of the Democratic ticket. And even then, I'm not sure that would happen.

The Senate, if we were talking a month ago, I would have said the Senate Democrats would have about a one in three chance of getting the majority. Now it's not 50/50, but it's not too far off of that. As you know, Democrats need – it's 53-47. So, to get to 50-50, so a Democratic vice president could break a tie they need three, or four if they don't. But Doug Jones in Alabama is going to lose, the Democratic incumbent there. So, Democrats have to win four seats. And you can – I can get Democrats to 48, maybe 49 just on a good night. I mean,

Arizona, Martha McSally. Colorado, Cory Gardner. Susan Collins in Maine. Those are the three states where Democrats have – I would say they're the slight favorites in each of those three. But those three only get them to 49. And they need something more.

And that's where they need – they need to have something of a wave or a tailwind to get – to beat Thom Tillis in North Carolina, or Kelly Loeffler, the appointed senator in Georgia, or to – they just got a break on Monday with Steve Bullock, the governor of Montana, getting against Steve Daines. And it's still uphill, but, you know, Democrats just went from zero to a 40 percent chance there. And you know, there are a couple others. Iowa. There's an open seat in Kansas where Democrats have a chance. So that they're – they can get to 49, and then they have five, six, seven, eight states that are plausible, that are all in the 25 to 40 percent chance. So that, you know, they just need one or two of those. But then Republicans will be trying to chip another Democratic seat off someplace, like Michigan maybe. So, it's not quite 50/50, but it's getting pretty close.

MR. KELLY: We're teeing up a pretty good nail-biter, down to the wire, huh?

MR. COOK: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KELLY: That's interesting.

So, a question about the – a polling question. Where's that – yeah, what changes have been made to make sure the polling mistakes of 2016 are not repeated in the 2020 election?

MR. COOK: Well, I think you realize that you're not going to get any short answers. So that's a good thing. First, look, if we were talking five years ago, I would have said, look, there's some challenges in the polling business. And people they say, well, cellphones. Well, actually, that's not a big deal. I mean, Gallup, 70 percent of their samples are going to people with cellphones. That's not – it's caller ID and voicemail that has made it so difficult to do – to do polling. In a previous life I was a pollster. Back in those days, you could do 100 calls and you'd get 25 completed interviews. Today you're lucky if you get six out of 100 calls. So, it's phenomenally expensive.

It's not that the quality has done down so much as the expense has gone enormously up. Well, people say, well, wait a minute, but the polls were all wrong in 2016. And I say, well, which ones are you talking about? They say, well, the national polls. And I say, well, OK, because the national polls all said Hillary Clinton would win, and obviously Donald Trump won. Well, what do national polls measure? They measure the national popular vote. They don't try to do states, right? On election day if you got up in the morning and you looked at Real Clear Politics, which is sort of the average that most people look at, she had a three point lead in the major national polls, and she won the national popular vote by 2.1 percentage points, 2.9 million votes.

Nine-tenths of a point. That's about as good as this stuff gets. And it's actually closer than they had been in 2012, when the national polls were showing Obama-Romney closer than it had been. So, the national polls were off, but not that much. And normally, a 2.1 percent

popular vote would, under the old-world order before we had the quite the breakout of states, that it would work. It was in, I'd say, 42-43 states went exactly the way the polling suggested, exactly the way everybody expected. There were three or four states, like, you know, Florida for example, that, you know, too close to call. Polls said they were too close to call. Guess what? You know, Obama won by one. Trump won by one. Democrats lost the Senate and governors' races in 2018 by one point, Florida by one point.

And in three states they were just wrong. The polls were just flat wrong. And it was in those, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania. Now, what are pollsters doing? What they found was went back. In those three states – nationally, a tiny bit, but more – well, whites were a tiny bit under-sampled. Whites with less than a four-year college degree were a tiny bit under-sampled. And in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, there's a slightly higher number of whites with less than a four-year college degree in those three states. And it was enough to make a difference in really tight race.

So now what pollsters are doing, they're making – they're taking real efforts to make sure, looking at education, that they're getting the numbers right. But the thing is, if you weight it up a lot, whites with less than a four-year college degree, you might have missed the college-educated white suburban women that are trending the other way and that are – so it's – and then in 2018, the polls were dead-on. So, it was – we're really talking about three states that went bad. And –

MR. KELLY: So, you're not worried. You feel like – you know, you're doing this professionally. I mean, the data that you're getting, the things you're comparing, they're –

MR. COOK: Here's what I find reassuring. I think we're going to have a massive turnout this year. And interesting, the 2018 midterm election was the highest voter turnout in a midterm since 1914. And that was coming on the heels of the previous midterm, 2014, was the lowest midterm election turnout since 1942. And 2016, about average.

We're seeing intensity levels of both people that love President Trump and people that loathe him – all the polls are showing massive turnout. Well, what that means is the electorate is going to look more or less like all registered voters. And where you're less likely to have these groups that are over – you know, over-voting or under-voting, the differences become less. So, I'm not – you know, there are a lot of things I worry about, but I'm worried less about polling this time than normal.

But we're going to be going – you know, I think online polling is just not perfected yet. And there's some good online polls, but most of the stuff that people see is really not very good, and that the – to do an online poll right costs almost as much as a live telephone interview poll. I mean, it's really hard. And that's not what people are seeing in the papers when they read some of these online polls that you see about every day.

MR. KELLY: The old-fashioned way.

So, here's a question: What are your thoughts on the potential for a mixed-party ticket if Biden gets the nomination? I'm not sure what – how would you interpret that?

MR. COOK: Well, I mean, it would be – I mean, remember in 2008 – I mean, you remember well, when John McCain was looking at – he really wanted to pick Joe Lieberman. He really did. And he also wanted to pick Tom Ridge, who was a Republican. But both of them are pro-choice. And his staff, his advisors, convinced him: Senator, if you pick a pro-choice running mate, you pick a Democrat, and the delegates will burn the convention hall to the ground. I mean, they really will. And after a long time, he very reluctantly went along. And I think when all is said and done, my guess is he went to his grave regretting that he didn't pick one of his two buddies, because it – you know, who knows, it might have done – it might not have made any difference at all.

But I don't think he'll do that. And the thing is, if you really wanted – I don't think that Biden would need to go hard, hard left for a running mate, but if they picked a Republican, or picked anybody ideologically in exactly the same space that Biden was, that would be tempting the gods. But the only thing I'm positive of is that you and I hopefully will live into our hundreds. We're never going to see two white males on a Democratic ticket again – president, vice president. I mean, that ain't – that ain't happening. So, whether he goes with an African American man, an African American woman, a Latino man, a Latino woman, white – it's not going to be a white male. We know that for sure.

MR. KELLY: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Do you see Trump making a change to counter that?

MR. COOK: I think you could go broke trying to predict what he's going to do. And I don't know the man. Way I look at it is to dump Pence would be admitting that he's in trouble and it would be a sign of weakness. And I don't think he's somebody that particularly likes to project that. Having said that, do I think he has any loyalty to Mike Pence? No. But you know, and the question I keep getting people to ask, well, does he dump Pence for Nikki Haley? And you know, I don't think it'll happen, but it could.

But the other question is, would Nikki Haley take it? Because right now – I get asked about three people for the 2024 Republican nomination – Nikki Haley, Mike Pence, and Mike Pompeo. That's the list. And she got out of the administration while the getting was good. And she got out really great shape. Does she feel lucky? You know, turning him down might not be a good thing either, so.

MR. KELLY: So, talk a little bit more about the general election now. We focused a lot on the Democrats, in terms of the Trump campaign. I mean, he had a pretty impressive actual, you know, technical ground-level campaign the last time. And do you see that – is he rebuilding that in a strong way? Is that going to be the difference maker?

MR. COOK: I think in – I think they did three things smart. They – Michigan, Wisconsin, that everybody laughed about when they started going in there, and central Pennsylvania. And they did – they did do a good job there. That campaign – you know, I wouldn't call it a hot mess, but there was – you know, when you win you look great, and when you lose, you're a bum. And

that's just the way it is, and it's always been. I think this campaign will be – his campaign will be much, much, much, much, much, much better than the last one was. But presumably, a Democrat won't make quite the mistakes that were made there. I mean, the question is, would – you know, how much of that victory was Donald Trump and was his campaign, and how much of it was Hillary Clinton and her campaign?

And, you know, I think the word “deplorable” was good for a half-million votes, a million votes, you know? Or, not going to Wisconsin – not spending money in Michigan, Wisconsin, or in central Pennsylvania. A lot of things could have been different. But, you know, the thing that's so confounding to me about that election was I think you had a lot of voters that would never, ever, ever have voted for Donald Trump, but they really didn't want to vote for Hillary Clinton. But I think a lot of them were prepared to do it. They were going to hold their noses and vote for her, but they weren't happy.

And then that last month before the election, it looked like there was no way Trump could win. There was no way Hillary Clinton could lose, particularly after the Billy Bush tapes. I just think you had a bunch of people that really didn't want to vote for Hillary Clinton, that were really ambivalent, that decided on election day they didn't have to, she was going to win no matter what. And then on election night they, like everybody else, was pretty surprised. So, I mean, there's no data to support that, but my hunch is that explains as much as anything else what happened. But his people were – they had an intensity. But they will have a better campaign this time, no doubt about it.

MR. KELLY: But if you do the math on those three states, and as we all know the margins were so – you know, 60,000 votes. How many thousand votes, whatever it turned out to be. And you talk about the weakness of Hillary Clinton, now Biden, reasserting the center. It could, by one token, seem inconceivable that Trump could win. I mean, tipping it back to the normal balance would give it to Biden.

MR. COOK: Well, one would think that having a campaign in a state like Michigan would be worth at least two-tenths of a point. I mean, getting out the urban vote in Detroit, getting the kids out in Ann Arbor and Lansing. Same thing in Milwaukee and Madison. That just doing that would be enough. But so that would sense to say, well, OK, well, Democrats ought to win both. But on the other hand, if the Trump campaign is much better – is much better funded than it was last time, and is much better organized than last time, you know, it keeps those in play.

But also, where's the president showing real problems? In suburbs, middle-class, upscale, college-educated suburbs. And you know, just as a lot of us were not looking to Michigan, Wisconsin being the deciders, I think people that are not looking at North Carolina or Arizona are – and are forgetting about Florida, because the margins there have never been much. So, I think those six – I mean, on a bigger scale, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia's actually not even really a swing state, Pennsylvania, Maine, New Hampshire, Ohio is more red than purple nowadays, Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona. And probably in four years, Texas. That's going to be the full battlefield. But I think those six are the ones that are most likely to be the deciding ones.

And just one other thing. I know we're running out of time, but we – you know, people will say, why didn't – President Trump has done very little to go after swing voters, moderates, independents. Very, very little. And for the first two years, I kind of wondered if President Trump were trying to lose reelection, what would he be doing differently? And then it occurred to me maybe there's method to this madness. And I started realizing that I think what they're doing is taking a page from Karl Rove's playbook for George W. Bush in 2004. That Rove and the Bush campaign looked and saw: We're not going to win too many swing voters, or enough swing voters. We're going to have to organically grow our base, that that's the only way we do this. You know, so that they did some swing, but a lot of base building.

I think the Trump campaign has looked at this and said: You know, we could spend our entire budget chasing after swing voters in the suburbs, and a lot of them are just really predisposed not to vote – to vote against him. So, what we need to do is in six, seven, eight states find every single person that voted for him, and then look in their household, their next door, down the block, their cousin. I mean, find every person that's just like them that isn't registered or doesn't usually vote, and that they're better off doing that than chasing after swing voters who are predisposed to oppose him.

And you know, it may be a strategy of necessity rather than choice, but I think they're right. That's the only way they could do this. And it's not many states, so you know, I think the electoral college is going to be 50-50. I mean, I think popular vote, I would be surprised if President Trump held the popular. But, you know, he – a Democrat could conceivably lose, or win rather, the popular vote by 4 or 5 million votes, 3 or 4 percentage points this time, and still could lose the electoral college. So, I think this is time where we can't take our eye off the ball in those swing states.

MR. KELLY: Well, it is good to know that you're with us, Charlie. You will not be taking your eye off the ball. It's a surprising year, but the members of The Economic Club will not be that surprised. So, we'll look forward to having you back and talking about this some more.

MR. COOK: Thanks a lot, Brian.

MR. KELLY: Thanks, Charlie.

MR. COOK: Thank you.



Charlie Cook, Editor and Publisher, *The Cook Political Report*; Political Analyst, National Journal Group and NBC News

Charlie Cook is the Editor and Publisher of *The Cook Political Report*, and a political analyst for the National Journal Group. Charlie is also a political analyst for NBC News.

In 1984, Charlie founded the independent, non-partisan *Cook Political Report*. Now, with a staff of six, it is a publication that the *New York Times* once said was “a newsletter that both parties regard as authoritative” while CBS News’ Bob Schieffer called it “the bible of the political community.”

Al Hunt in the Wall Street Journal has referred to Cook as “the Picasso of election analysis.”

The late David Broder of *The Washington Post*, long considered "the Dean of the Washington press corps", once wrote that Charlie Cook is “perhaps the best non-partisan tracker of Congressional races.”

Charlie has appeared on the *ABC World News Tonight*, the *CBS Evening News*, the *NBC Nightly News*, and on *ABC’s This Week*. Since the 1990’s, he has also appeared on *NBC’s Meet the Press* over a dozen times. Over the years, Charlie has served as an Election Night analyst for CBS, CNN, and, since 1996, on the *NBC News Election Night Decision Desk* in New York.

In 2010, Charlie was the co-recipient of the American Political Science Association’s prestigious Carey McWilliams award to honor “a major journalistic contribution to our understanding of politics.” In 2013, Charlie served as a Resident Fellow at the Institute of Politics at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.