THE ECONOMIC CLUB

OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

Virtual Signature Event

Election Panel

Panelists

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Gloria Borger
Chief Political Analyst, CNN

Charlie Cook
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Moderator
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DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: I'd like to now introduce our four principal speakers. And I would just say, I know all of them have incredible biographies. And if I read the biographies in great detail, we won't go too far into the conversation. So, let me just briefly introduce them. I apologize for not giving as long an introduction as they probably deserve.

Mike Allen – I'll do this alphabetically – Mike Allen is the co-founder of Axios and, I would say, maybe Washington's most indefatigable journalist and most knowledgeable journalist about everything going on in Washington. He never sleeps. He works around the clock. And so, it's always easy to get him on the phone or get him on email, because he's always awake. And, Mike, thank you very much for everything you're doing to bring knowledge and information to people. You've been doing it for quite a while, with Politico and Axios. Thank you for joining us.

MIKE ALLEN: Thank you, David, for having me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Gloria Borger is the chief political analyst at CNN. And I'm sure if you watch CNN you see her on the Wolf Blitzer "Situation Room" show and also Anderson Cooper "AC 360," and many other shows. I've known Gloria for many, many years. And she knows more about politics than virtually anybody I've ever met. And she knows a great deal about campaigns. And we're looking forward to her comments. Thank you very much, Gloria.

GLORIA BORGER: Thank you.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Next is Charlie Cook. Charlie Cook invented, more or less, the idea of having nonpartisan political analysis put out on campaigns on a regular basis. And he invented and now is the editor and publisher of The Cook Political Report. And I think many people would say he's about the most knowledgeable person in the United States about what's going on in every congressional district and every Senate race. And we're very pleased to have Charlie here. Thank you very much, Charlie.

And Nikole Killion. Nikole Killion is a CBS correspondent who's covering the White House, who's covering the campaign for CBS. And she's very knowledgeable about what's going on in the campaigns now, because she's covered both of them and covered the White House. And so, Nikole, thank you very much for joining us as well.

NIKOLE KILLION: Thank you.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And, Nikole, your connection is working. We were worried about your connection not working. It's OK? So, all right.

So why don't we just start by saying this – or, let me ask all of you this question: John Kenneth Galbraith famously once said: "The conventional wisdom in Washington is almost always wrong." So, the conventional wisdom in Washington today generally is that Joe Biden is more likely than not to be the next president of the United States. So, can each of you tell us, is this conventional wisdom wrong or do you think it's right? Why don't we just start alphabetically? I'm going start with Mike.

MR. ALLEN: Sure, David. This is the time when the conventional wisdom that the conventional wisdom is wrong seems to be wrong. So anything that you and I would look at – money, swing state polls, national polls, direction of the country, what people talk about online, the sentiment, the quantity – anything that we can measure – and, David, you've done very well in life, in part based on things that you can measure – points to a Joe Biden victory. But the asterisk – and in these times we always put asterisks, is that elections aren't held on paper. Elections are humans. And we found that out last time. But any one of those buckets that I've mentioned, to be upside in them is a huge problem. And the president is upside in every single one of them.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Gloria?

MS. BORGER: Well, I agree with Mike. We have to now – we're done talking about the popular vote. We're done talking about Joe Biden being up anywhere between, you know, eight and 10 points. Now we are down to talking to the road to 270[1], which is I think what Mike is talking about. And you have to look at it state by state because we have to look at it in terms of the Electoral College.

And if you look at it in terms of where the president won last time and where he's in trouble this time, it doesn't look good for him. If you were to just look at those three states that he won, surprising Hillary Clinton – you know, those blue states, the blue wall, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania – there is a reason that Donald Trump was in Erie, Pennsylvania yesterday. And that is because they're worried about it because Joe Biden is up by eight or nine points, depending on what poll you look at.

So, while Joe Biden is playing offense, they are playing defense. And they are trying to plug holes right now, and looking at states that shouldn't be close, but are close. And what they're trying to do is flip those states and hope that they're close enough that they can keep them in their camp. But they have an awful lot of work to do, and only a couple weeks left.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Charlie? What's the conventional wisdom, right or wrong?

CHARLIE COOK: Well, I think the conventional wisdom is going to hold up. In my mind it's already going to tip over into landslide territory. I think now every day goes by that the president is this far behind, not just – not just nationally, you know, the 10 points, but in every single key state he's behind at least a little. And in enough for 270, he's behind by a whole lot.

I mean, that I think – so I'm actually spending more time looking at the U.S. Senate, because right now the question in my mind is not whether the Senate's going to flip, but how big will the majority be for Democrats in the Senate. And that's such an incredibly impactful thing, because a Democratic majority of 50 or 51 is one thing, but 53 or (5)4 or (5)5 or higher is something very different, particularly without the filibuster. So, I think this is – I think every

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[1] The Electoral College consists of 538 electors, and an absolute majority of electoral votes, 270 or more, is required to win the election.

once in a while – we've only seen two wave presidential elections in my life – 1964 and 1980. I think we're in the middle of a third one.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Nikole, conventional wisdom, right or wrong?

MS. KILLION: Well, I would say the first lesson I learned in politics is that it's always a surprise. One of the first races I covered was a state's attorney's race in Cook County with Dick Devine, who at the time was a challenger and wasn't expected to win. And he did. So, I am not going to pretend to make any types of predictions. And I also don't know that you can use conventional wisdom in an unconventional year. There has been so much that has transpired this year, from impeachment, to the coronavirus pandemic, to the wave of unrest that we saw over the summer, to the president contracting coronavirus, which some may not have been surprised by.

But all that being said, to Mike's point, yes, the metrics may be pointing us one direction. But I think, you know, two weeks is a long time in politics – now 13 days. So, I would say we have to wait and see.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: For all of you who are having a view that maybe Biden is more likely than Trump at this point, what would be your view if there had been no coronavirus or no COVID-19? The economy, let's presume, would have stayed fairly nice. Do you have any doubt that Trump would have won reelection, or would more likely win reelection had there been no COVID-19? Mike?

MR. ALLEN: Looking, again, at metrics, and looking at the history of presidential races, how people feel, their pocketbooks, the direction of the country, the direction of the economy all have been fantastic predictors. But again, that's paper. What we didn't see is what it would have been like to have both of these candidates in a kinetic campaign reacting to contact. Voters were robbed of that this time. And that's what we would have seen in a conventional unconventional year.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Gloria, what do you think?

MS. BORGER: Well, I agree. Look, I agree. Without having a conventional campaign – COVID is the one enemy that Trump can taunt, but he can't beat it. And it was an enemy and is an enemy that goes to the very core of presidential leadership and what it is like to lead in a time of crisis. And by all accounts, the voters – and the last poll I looked at was yesterday. I think it was 58 percent of the voters think he's done a bad job. They don't trust him on COVID. He picks a fight with Tony Fauci, whom they think is doing a very good job. And they trust him by more than 60 percent.

So, you have a president who the public believes has been unable to lead in the one crisis that affects everyone's life in every single way. Normally that's the economy, as Mike is talking about, because – you know, James Carville, it's the economy, stupid. Well, this election it's been the COVID. And so, I think that as a test of leadership he has failed it, according to the

public. And while he still does OK on those economic numbers – more people still trust him to handle the economy – the COVID is outweighing everything else right now.

And the more he complains about Tony Fauci, and the science, and the doctors, and – he doesn't do himself any good here. He is – it's OK with his base if he does that, but he does not broaden himself one whit. And I think that has been his real Achilles' heel here, which is he did not know how to handle the crisis. He didn't show any empathy during the crisis to people who have suffered during this crisis. So, it exposed everything about Donald Trump that his supporters and the White House did not want to have out there for the American public to view.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Gloria, when he attacks Tony Fauci, do his advisors go to him and say that's not a good thing to do? Or they say, do it more?

MR. BORGER: Well, members of Congress, I know, personally go to him and say: That is not a good thing to do. [Laughs.] And they don't want him to continue doing it. But you can tell Donald Trump liked to do it. So, he attacks Fauci and then he says, oh, yeah, but he's a really nice guy. I like Tony Fauci. [Laughs.] As if he's not then calling him an idiot and stupid. So, I think it falls on – it falls on deaf ears. Donald Trump will do what he wants to do. He is full of grievance about this election, but it is about himself. You know, when he ran in 2016 the grievance that he shared with American voters was about their lives, and their jobs, and the way they were being treated by Democrats. This election has been about his own personal grievance. And I think a lot of voters don't want to really care about that. They care about themselves.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Charlie, you mentioned the Senate races. Is COVID-19 as big a factor in the Senate races? And are the Republicans running away from Trump now, who are in danger, or are they saying: No, I'm really going to go down with him, or stay with him, whatever you want to – expression you want to use?

MR. COOK: Well, let me to try to do both of these because I frankly think that all this coronavirus talk – that President Trump – and I'll get this in. But I think President Trump was facing a very uphill challenge for reelection before the coronavirus. That when you have two candidates running and neither one is an incumbent, that's a choice election. Who do I like? Who do I identify with? Who do I – you know, strengths, weaknesses, pros, cons of each. But when you have an incumbent president running for reelection, it's a referendum up or down. Do you want to renew that president's contract for another four years, yes or no?

And a president that averages in the Gallup poll 38 percent for his entire first year in office, the lowest approval rating for any elected incumbent in post-World War II history by an 11-point margin – 38. Bill Clinton was at 49 percent. He was the next lowest. When you have a second year in office – and second year he goes up two points to 40 percent – 40 percent, the lowest second year of any elected president in history. Then you go the third year, and he goes up two more points to 42. He's no longer the lowest because Jimmy Carter had come in at 37, but you don't average 41 percent for your presidency, given that the presidential job approval rating is the best predictor of whether incumbent president – so I think before the coronavirus came along he was already on thin ice. I think he got thinner, thinner, thinner ice as he – more he talked about the coronavirus. And frankly, I think he fell through the ice at the debate. And

you know, I don't talk to many Republican consultants or strategists that think that there's a chance in the world that he gets reelected.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Well, thank you for reminding me of Jimmy Carter's low ratings. I used to work for him. [Laughter.] So, Nikole, when you're out on the campaign trail, you're talking to, let's say, Republican advisors to President Trump. Do they, you know, say that COVID is the problem, or is it the candidate's the problem?

MS. KILLION: Well, I think, to them, they're trying to look past both, if you will. Obviously with the coronavirus we've seen the president continue to campaign with these large mass rallies. And every time I ask the campaign about this – [laughs] – and whether they think that is OK, you know, they go back to the fact, well, they've got safety protocols in place, they hand out masks. I mean, at the end of the day the president's going to do what the president wants to do. He wants to be out there. And that is, quite frankly, the campaign's strongest asset.

You know, as far as staying on message, I think that is another challenge for the campaign. Certainly, the closing argument in these last two weeks I think many would like to see be about the economy. That is something that the president often makes as his claim to fame, you know, is that the economy was great before coronavirus, and he is the one who can get it back on track. But you know, when we hear him talking about Dr. Fauci this week, or the "60 Minutes" interview – [laughs] – you know, for us at CBS News, you know, it does take the president off-message.

So that being said, I think they are trying to do the best they can under the circumstances. They are trying to project a sense of confidence to the best of their ability, as far as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania are concerned. The campaign for some time has, you know, walked that back as far as trying to win all three again. While they certainly want to defend the map that the president had in 2016, you know, for several weeks now, maybe even months I would argue, they have said that they don't necessarily have to win all three, which I think kind of gives you an indication of their concern potentially in those states, and that they may want to try to overcompensate in other states. They keep saying they feel like they have a shot in Minnesota, they feel like they have a shot in Nevada. So clearly they are looking to other paths, if they are not successful with the ones the president has won in the past.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, tomorrow night we have a debate. And this might be the last chance for somebody to turn it around, let's say. So, let's pretend you are not journalists and the president called you up and said: I want your advice on how I can win this debate and turn around the election. I really need some advice. Pretend that you are my advisor, be my advisor. Mike, what would you tell him he can do to change – with a different approach in the debate, what should he do?

MR. ALLEN: David, something that you know about business, and life, and sports, and politics is they're all games of addition. And that's something that we haven't seen from this president, going back to day one of the administration, let alone the campaign. One thing that I think any debate doctor would tell the president is: You've got your people. Your people love you. But they are going to vote for you. You need a couple more. What could other tools –

are in the toolbox – what else can you say that might connect, resonate with someone that is open to you, or was maybe with you before and that we've lost, or maybe isn't excited about the other side. Play the game of addition.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Gloria, what would you advise the president to do?

MS. BORGER: [Laughs.] Well, it's one thing to advise him to do something. I don't think he'd take anyone's advice, to be honest. I don't think they're going to do much debate prep. This is not a person who resets himself in any way, shape, or form. His friends – I reported the other day, his friends when he was in the hospital tried to get him to reset on COVID – say how he understood COVID a little bit better now. And now – and he didn't – he didn't do that. The reaching out I think obviously, as Mike is saying, you want him to kind of try and broaden his base, which is something he has never done.

And I think at this point it may be – it may be too late. So you would just – I would argue that at this point maybe you want to say no harm – [laughs] – which is, don't tell women that the way you can get their votes is to talk about dishwashers, or tell them – women, please love me. Maybe show a little bit of a sense of humor. Maybe don't interrupt or be as rude as you were during the last – during the last debate. And stop complaining about the debate moderator and the debate before you walk in the room. But you know, you can offer this advice to Donald Trump. And you can tell him – and maybe it'll last for one answer – but then he reverts to form. So, I think whatever advice, whatever you give him. And maybe that's why they're not doing a lot of debate prep. Whatever advice you give him is just not going to be heated in any way, shape, or form.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Gloria, President Trump has not done a lot of self-deprecating humor over the years.

MS. BORGER: [Laughs.] Have you noticed? Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But I've never actually seen him laugh. Why is that? He never seems to laugh.

MS. BORGER: You know, it's a really interesting – it's a really interesting question. Privately, people who know him well say to me that, yes, he does have a sense of humor and he can laugh, but never at himself. You know, he just can't. You know, you look at the Al Smith dinners,[2] they're supposed to be full of self-deprecating humor. He just doesn't – he can't – he can't really do that. He can make a joke at the expense of Melania, but never at himself. I think that he would take that, and see that as a sign of weakness and, more than anything else, he does not want to ever be seen as weak. That's why he'll never reset himself, because he can never admit he made a mistake.

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[2] The Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner, commonly known as the Al Smith Dinner, is an annual event in New York City that raises funds for Catholic charities in the Archdiocese of New York. Thee dinner is known for having luminous guest speakers who honor and entertain dinner audiences with light humor and political savvy.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Charlie, let's talk about the debate with respect to the other candidate. So, Biden is ahead, you've pointed out, and you think he's way ahead. What could he do that messes up the debate? What would you advise him, if you were advising Biden to do in this debate, to just make he gets through it without making any mistakes? What should his strategy be?

MR. COOK: I think I'd get a good night's sleep before the debate. I would just be – I mean, the thing is, I don't think this election is about Joe Biden. I mean, I really don't. I think this is up or down on President Trump. I think as long as Vice President Biden doesn't, you know, have a mental lapse and stare at the camera for 30 seconds or a minute, I don't think it really matters a heck of a lot what he says. Because I mean, I think people have hit the mute switch on this campaign. I think the previous debate, the other debate, was a time when people just gave up on him. And that's when he went through the ice. And we saw a hit on Republican candidates all over. They've done.

I mean, what voters are saying is: Who's going to make my life normal again? And that's not – President Trump has no way to get there. He just doesn't. And, you know, I think this is – you know, I hate saying it's over, but I tell you what I've never – I mean, we're looking at some incredibly bad data for him. I mean, when he's – when he's a point behind in Texas – a point behind in Texas. I mean, really. That's a lagging indicator that he's in trouble. So, I don't know that Biden, short of having some moment, like, I don't know that there's anything that he could actually say that would change the trajectory of this campaign.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Nikole, you know people from both sides. Is it in your view – why does Biden now just not show up at the debate? Because he's ahead. He has no need to debate. And did he ever consider not debating? And do you think the Trump people regret that Trump didn't do the second debate, because it would have been a big audience?

MS. KILLION: Well, I think as far as the Biden campaign is concerned, they've always argued that they wanted to honor the process and do the three debates. I mean, I was at the vice presidential debate in Utah. You'll recall the next day the Commission on Presidential Debates announced that they were going virtual. And the president instantly came out and said that he wasn't going to do it. And even at that time, you know, the Biden campaign seemed to suggest that they wanted to continue through the process.

But, look, I think for both campaigns that really is what tomorrow night is about. You know, it is – and just for the value of the voters. You know, I think voters, even though many of them have made their minds up, and that there is a small sliver of undecided voters still out there, it still is really like this last, best chance to see the candidates side-by-side which, as we pointed out earlier in this discussion, voters really haven't had a chance to do. They've really had to evaluate these candidates kind of at arm's distance. And so, I think there is value to moving forward with the debate.

That being said, they're still at odds over how it should transpire. Certainly, the Trump campaign has been clear that they feel this debate should be about foreign policy and not a range of topics – many of the topics similar to what we saw in the first debate. You know, I don't

know that the Trump campaign regrets that there wasn't a second debate, because obviously we had both candidates do their respective town halls with different networks. And the president coming out of that NBC debate thought he did pretty well. So, I don't think that they look at that as a bad thing.

You know, I think certainly the Trump campaign would like to see the president interrupt less. And he has been advised as such. You know, as to whether or not he will do that, we will see. I mean, the bottom line is the president is a counterpuncher. He has said that about himself. So, I think as far as the tone that you saw in the first debate, quite frankly, I wasn't that surprised. You know, if you've been listening to what he said on the campaign trail, listening to how he has gone after Joe Biden, questioning his mental acuity, I mean, really going in on him, I was not surprised, I know others were, by how he came off.

But because this is the last chance for voters to evaluate the candidates that he may want to walk that back. Even talking to voters here in Tennessee, which is a very red state, you know, people were turned off by that, as we know, not just here but across the country. So hopefully both candidates will approach this as an opportunity to put their plans forward, and what they will do for the country. I think that's certainly what voters would like to get out of it.

MS. BORGER: I think – if I can just add – I think the big thing in talking to the Biden people is, you know, during the first debate they had warned Biden, and they didn't want him to lose his temper – he has a temper, and he can lose it. And at a certain point, remember, he said to Donald Trump to shut up, which I think he might have been speaking for a lot of people. [Laughs.] But that was not a presidential move. And that he was prepared for the Hunter Biden stuff, which they think worked against Trump because he was so mean. But I think that they want the difference to be president – a presidential candidate who acts like a president versus one who does not act like a president. And I think that that's their – that's their goal.

You've spoken about stability. I think they want someone stable. And they believe the public is exhausted by all of this. And so, they want someone to show, you know, you don't have to deal with this every day anymore. I am stable. I can be a real president for all America. That's what they want in this last debate. They want the contrast to be even larger than it was at the last debate, without Joe Biden losing his temper.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Mike, why are the Republicans so intent on getting Amy Coney Barrett confirmed before the election? And does it seem to be having any resonance with voters out there who are going to support Trump more, because he gets her confirmed if he does?

MR. ALLEN: So, the why is clear. And that is, when you have power you use it. And the Republicans have the ability to do it. And so, they're pulling it off. There was, David, a lot of trepidation about what might happen after the election, when you could well have a Biden win, when you could well have Democrats taking the Senate. But how would that change the dynamic? And I can tell you, the McConnell team was very concerned about that. And that's why this rocket docket of getting her in before the election.

Why doesn't it resonate? I think it does with a lot of the voters the president has. If you want to look at why he has, a lot of the Evangelical Christians that he has, some of the parts of his coalition that might not love the more colorful parts of the president, that's important to them. But he hasn't really talked about it that much. Right out of the gate he talked a lot about it, and we have that chant, fill the seat. And at the next rally, like the next day, the campaign had official red signs: Fill that seat. But there's a great book out, David, called "How to Lead."[3] It's a great gift. And in there, there are 13 attributes of leadership. And the president has some of them, but one of them that he doesn't have is focus. And I think that that's one of the reasons that the Judge Amy Coney Barrett message maybe hasn't had as much resonance as it might have.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Hey, Gloria, let me ask you a question. The networks like to call the election, you know, as soon as the polls are over, historically. So, are you more nervous about doing that this year because of all the questions that have been raised about the absentee ballots and so forth? And are you still going to be using exit polls? And so, do you think the networks are going to call this on the election night, and –

MS. BORGER: No.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You don't think so?

MS. BORGER: No. I don't think so. When you look at the Supreme Court decision, for example, in the state of Pennsylvania, where you have until November 6th, for example, to count all these ballots. I think that they're not. And I can't speak for all the networks, I can't even speak for my own – [laughs] – but what I know is that everyone is very careful, going to be very careful. And we are preparing our viewers that this is going to be a bunch of a days. And look, if Joe Biden – and Charlie can talk about this better than I can – if Joe Biden were to win Florida right away, and that was counted early, then you'd have to say well the path is a really, really, really narrow for the president. But I don't think any network anytime, anywhere, and I don't think any journalist anywhere worth his or her salt, is going to be calling things early.

This is – we have – we have a lot of paper ballots that need to be counted. It is hard to count paper ballots. They come in one envelope. You have to open that one envelope. It's time consuming. Open that one envelope, then it's in another envelope. Then you have to compare a signature. You have to – there are things that need to be done that cannot be done immediately. Some states start counting earlier than other states. It is our – it is important we explain all of this to our viewers as we watch along with them on election night. And maybe it won't necessarily take days, but, you know, I'm old enough to remember 2020 – [laughs] – I mean, I'm sorry, 2000 – the election of 2000. And so that took 36 days, and it went to the Supreme Court.

So, I do think that there are lawyers at the ready on both sides. And, Charlie, I'm going to hand this to you now, because you probably know better than I do the state-by-state issues here. But they're complicated.

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[3] How to Lead: Wisdom from the World's Greatest CEOs, Founders, and Game Changers, by David Rubenstein

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But you don't expect any gracious concession speech on election night, is that correct?

MS. BORGER: No. I don't. I could be wrong, but I don't.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Charlie, let's go – go ahead, Charlie.

MR. COOK: Yeah. I was just going to say that if you look – you know, you think of the states from the most Republican – you know, Idaho to Massachusetts, and of course, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania are the tipping point states in terms of partisanship. But since they are so slow, you know, you had – in 2016 Pennsylvania was called by the Associated Press at 1:35 in the morning, Wisconsin at 2:29, and Michigan was, what, a week or two later. I think that we're going to have – I think there will be signs that we can look for on election night that will give us some clues which way – which way this thing's headed.

I mean, if you just go by calls from 2016, 9:00 Eastern time Texas was called. I'm going to be watching that pretty closely. 9:36, Ohio was called. 10:50, Florida. 11:11 North Carolina. 11:33, Georgia. 12:02, Iowa. And at least for the Texas, Ohio, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia – if the president loses one single one of those, this – you can put your pajamas on. This is over, long before it gets to Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, where he's pretty hopelessly behind now. So, I think we'll have a pretty good clue. It won't be a call, but I think we'll have a pretty good – you know, with 75-80 percent degree of confidence that we'll know who the next president's going to be.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Charlie, you know the states as anybody, so let's go down a couple Senate races. Maine, who's going to win there?

MR. COOK: I think it's one of the three tipping point states, with North Carolina and Iowa. I would say – I'd say it will be Sara Gideon.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And North Carolina. Has the recent scandal affected the Democratic candidate?

MR. COOK: Either none or very little. Cal Cunningham still has a three, four point lead. He was, like, five, six, seven. I think people vote red; they're voting blue. And they're – you know, this is a parliamentary election. So, I think a sex scandal – I never would have thought that I would say this – but it's had virtually – it's had very little impact on this race.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Sex isn't what it used to be, in other words. What about South Carolina?

MR. COOK: That's a really tough one. That's so different from every other race because this has nothing to do with the state changing demographics, it has nothing to do with the president, it has nothing to do with partisanship. It's to do with whether Lindsey Graham – do voters in South Carolina trust him anymore? Do they trust anything he says anymore? And has he just become too much of a politician? And the transition from being – given that John McCain and President Trump were mortal enemies – the transition from being John McCain's best friend to

the president's best friend in Congress, golfing buddy, in a shockingly short period of time has even Trump people in that state saying: Who are you, and can we trust you on anything? But I don't think I'd want – I don't know if I want to call that one or not.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. What about – how about Iowa?

MR. COOK: Iowa? I think Joni Ernst is going to lose. I think Theresa Greenfield's going to –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Colorado?

MR. COOK: That one's – yeah. Gardner – yeah, Hickenlooper wins.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And Montana?

MR. COOK: Gosh. It's about even. I think – I guess I'd go with Steve Daines by a hair, but just barely.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Arizona?

MR. COOK: That's pretty much over. It'll be Kelly.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And is there any – what do you think will be the biggest surprise race in any state or House race this year? Is there any surprise that you think will be the biggest surprise?

MR. COOK: Well, the one I worry about is Alaska, because you just never – that Senate race is – some polls are having it really, really close, some kind of. But things could be happening in Alaska, and we don't know. Nobody in the 48 – lower 48 understands Alaska. And it's just a hard – it's a hard state to poll. It's a hard state to read. I think if we were going to be shocked anywhere, it would be – it would be – it might be well in Alaska.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Let me ask you about the polls for a moment. Now that I'm home in COVID period, I get lots of calls, people asking me to participate in polls. And I, of course, say I'm too busy, I don't want to do it. Who actually answers these phones and participates in these polls? And is it really a representative sample? I mean, who are these people?

MR. COOK: You know, it's funny, some people answer the phones when there's a strange phone number. Some don't. But what's been helpful so far is the political – the partisanship and the ideology of people that are picking up the phones don't seem to be much different from the ones that aren't. You know, my wife won't pick it up. I will. You know, there's just not a lot of patterns there. The thing is there's this misnomer that the polls were wrong in 2016.

I don't know, the Real Clear Politics average going into election day was Hillary Clinton at 47, Donald Trump at 46. I mean, I'm sorry, 47 and 44. And when all the votes were counted she was at 48 and he was at 46. That's pretty darn close, I think. I think people had conflated the popular vote and the Electoral College vote. And you had three states that were wrong.

Basically 47 states what pretty much we expected, and three states were wrong – Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania. And you know, some research was done, found that noncollege Whites were systemically under-sampled in these polls. College-educated Whites were over-sampled.

Now that most pollsters have started weighting within – by race, by educational attainment. And in 2018, the polls were pretty darn good. So, I'm not really worried about polling quality. They're not commodities. All polls aren't equal, and some are better than others. And there are eight or 10 that I pay very close attention to. And there are others that if they were lying face up in a parking lot I would pick it up only to put it in the trashcan. It's worthless.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Nikole, have you been to any of the events that President Trump has been doing? Airport rallies, or those kind of – some call them super spreader events. Have you been to any of them, and what are they like, to go to those?

MS. KILLION: I have been. And I can say, in the age of COVID, CBS News has made a decision that we actually don't go inside of the rallies. So, in most – unless – you know, obviously if there's a pool situation. But as far as unilaterally when we are covering them. So, it's been a little odd, because I can't cover it in the traditional sense of getting in with the crowd. But we do have a chance – I mean, I have had an opportunity to go to a number of the president's events, most recently in North Carolina, Nevada a couple of weeks back, you know, where I have been able to talk to people before the crowds get too large.

And, look, you know, his base is his base. You know, most of the people I talk to at those rallies are die-hard for Trump. They think that he is doing a good job. And even those that think that he may have made some missteps, you know, I think it's still a scenario where it's a, yes, but. Well, he tweets this but, you know, I like that he says what he has to say and he kind of puts his money where his mouth is. That kind of thing. So, I think from that standpoint, his crowds and his base have been very enthusiastic. And in contrast, I think that has been one of the harder things to gauge with supporters for Joe Biden.

You know, I was covering the Democratic primary at the beginning of the year, though Super Tuesday. Then, of course, when the pandemic hit everything stopped, and so we've had to do everything virtually. And so, while the campaign primarily from March to about late summer did the bulk of their events virtually, it's just been very hard to gauge voters there. And since he has resumed some of these in-person, socially distanced events, I haven't had as much of an opportunity to talk to voters at those events. But I have talked to a number of voters who do support the former vice president.

And really, I would talk most specifically about when I was in Nevada, which again I think is a state to watch. And certainly, many people there who once supported Trump are having some misgivings about that. One voter in particular, basing it strictly on his response with the coronavirus pandemic. This was a bartender who was laid off, and who feels like it was the president's fault. You know, this was at a time when the president came into the state, defied the state's guidelines on coronavirus. And that was upsetting to this particular voter.

So, I think, you know, there are some of those Trump voters from 2016 who may be turning on the president this cycle, as has been noted, you know, with some of the other analysis we've had in this discussion. But you know, I would say those are kind of some of my takeaways from covering the trail. And I would say, you know, as far as CBS News, our battleground tracker that's kind of backed up some of that data, you know, especially that coronavirus is still really one of the top issues of concern out there for voters, and that many of them are concerned about the president's handling of them. And that's kind of what we're seeing in a lot of these state-by-state polls. You know, so much of it has to do with his response, and why we are seeing the former vice president have an edge in many of these battleground states.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right.

MS. BORGER: You know, I think those voters that you're talking about are – and if you look at them in the polling – it's the – not what we say. The noncollege educated White voters which Trump is still ahead with, but by a smaller margin now. So, you can actually see that Biden has peeled away some of that support. Maybe that support is women. But you can see that whereas Trump had a huge double-digit lead over Hillary Clinton with those voters, now that has shrunk to a degree where Joe Biden, depending on what part of the country you're in. So, he is peeling away some of that support.

Some of those voters are saying, I made a mistake. Lots of those voters may be women. But there is this sense of buyer's remorse out there. We just don't know how large it is, or how it will impact the electoral landscape until people – we really start getting some –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Yeah. If the 15th Amendment were repealed and the19th Amendment were repealed – the 15th gave former slaves the right to vote and 19th gave women the right to vote – Trump would be ahead, right? It's basically a White male vote.

MS. BORGER: [Laughs.] Well, women – let's just say the gender gap is a chasm right now. And he's not doing – he's not doing well with minority voters.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. So, Mike, let me ask you a question. Let's suppose we don't know who the winner is on election night, and it goes into the courts like it did in 2000. There's a theory that it could go to the House of Representatives. Can you explain how Trump could win the election that way, because a majority of delegations are controlled by Republicans right now, 26 to 24. Could that theoretically get Trump elected that way?

MR. ALLEN: It could, if you stipulate to a lot of intervening steps. And the mechanics of it are if it really remains a tie, if it really remains a jump ball, ultimately it's decided by the House where the state delegations choose one by one. And you're right. With the math from that, there turns out to be more Republicans than Democrats. If you look at what's going to happen in the shorter term, some sort of more likely post-election scenarios – we did a segment on Axios on HBO about the red mirage.

And the red mirage is that if you look at both public opinion polling and modeling based on past elections, you find that Democrats much more likely to vote by mail – 70/30, 60/40, or something like that. Republicans much more likely to vote in person – the exact flip. Further, Axios polling showed the more you hate Trump, the more likely you are to vote by mail. So, when you look at Michigan, Pennsylvania, some of these states that take a while to report, that means that on election night, as we're looking at Gloria's magic wall, the country may look a lot redder than it does ultimately.

Now, an asterisk to that is that Florida reports quickly. And as Charlie pointed out, without Florida you can put on your pajamas if you're a Republican. But that the red mirage comes from the fact that that map and election night the next day may look a lot redder than it turns out. But here's an underappreciated part of the red mirage. And that's when you vote by mail it's a lot easier to mess up your ballot than it is in person. In person they catch a lot of the mistakes. You vote by mail, like, if you don't get a witness correctly – in Pennsylvania we learned the great term "the naked ballots," which unfortunately turn out to be less exciting than they sound. A naked ballot means you forgot to include the internal envelope, almost like a wedding invitation. It needs that.

So, a certain percentage of those are going to be thrown out. And based on that polling, the more likely you are to vote Biden, the more likely you are to vote by mail, the more likely it is to be thrown out. So that is a little bit of an asterisk. USA Today estimated a million ballots could be thrown out that way.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Mike, let me ask you, people are waiting 11 hours to vote, standing in line 11 hours. Are they Trump voters or are they Biden voters?

MR. ALLEN: I don't think we know. And somebody else – one of my colleagues here may disagree with this. Like, definitely we've seen a lot of both early – and we're seeing the intensity in all kinds of ways, not just the number that are voting early, the fact that they're waiting. So much signs of intensity on both sides. But, David, I have to make one point about this. We talked about some of the gifts that the president was missing. Something that he has that's underappreciated – and all of us turn out to be wrong, if the asterisk at I gave at the beginning turns out to be controlling, if it turns out that the president wins a second upset and you bring us all back and you say explain why – the number-one thing that I would point to is the intensity, the excitement of his voters that you see in those rallies that Nikole was talking about.

You go out there and you see, like, Trump boats, the boat capades, the flotillas, the Trump golf cart parades, and the Trump car rallies. I went into – for my newsletter, Axios AM, I went into Getty Images to get a picture of a Trump flag. And there were all these people wearing Trump flags. And, David, you all know, there was nobody wearing Jimmy Carter flags, or Obama flags, or George W. Bush flags. So, the people that he has have a consistency and an intensity that any politician would envy.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Gloria, let me ask you, if Trump were to lose, do you expect that he would ever invite Biden to the White House for the traditional meeting afterwards? And do you expect that there would ever be any kind shaking of hands or anything between them still?

MS. BORGER: I cannot predict anything that Donald Trump would or would not do. I know that he did not unveil the Obama portrait in the White House. So, it's hard for me – the word magnanimous and Donald Trump normally don't sort of go together. I just can't – I just can't predict. There is a – there is a weird part of me that thinks that sometimes if you listen to Donald Trump – and Nikole can probably talk about this better than I can – he says things like: I don't need this job. You know, I had a happy life before this. And how he's going out there and doing the exact opposite of what all of his advisors are telling him to do. So, I'm wondering if in the back of his head he's kind of trying to figure out a way to move beyond this. I don't know. I mean, I have absolutely no idea, and I have no degree in psychology, nor do I want one.

So, I think that how gracious he would be to Joe Biden, you know, obviously the knee-jerk reaction is, yeah, he wouldn't be gracious at all. But he's also an entertainer, and he kind of understands that. So, I really – you know, I don't know the answer to that. I do know that the –

MS. KILLION: I would add, you know, they did have a conversation a couple of months back. I feel like it was not too long after the former vice president became the Democratic nominee, or sometime thereafter. And both were actually quite complimentary of the discussion that they had, although now, you know, they've gone to their separate corners. You know, the other thing that I would just point out too is I think both candidates have given thought to the prospect of both winning and losing.

And I think we've heard that. We've heard from the former vice president. He said that he would go back to teaching and, you know, maybe being a professor and, you know, working on issues of civility. And you know, if you listen closely enough to the president he too has made comments. I mean, most recently kind of in a joking matter. Like, how could I lose? What would happen? You know, maybe I'd have to leave the country. [Laughs.] But on a more serious level, you know, he has made some remarks over time about the prospects of that, and kind of going back to that former life that he had. So, I think both candidates, despite what they may say publicly and try to portray, I think both have given some real thoughts to it too.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Charlie, you didn't mention the House. Is the House going to go more Democratic than before? And will there be a majority of Democratic delegations in case it goes to the House?

MR. COOK: Well, in the House we – if you count it up – you do the sort of micropolitical race by race, all 435, you come up with – David Wasserman, our House editor, estimates about – a Republican loss of about 10 seats. Which isn't much, except that when it's on top of 40, last – you know, 40 in 2018, that actually is a whole lot. So, say, five seats give or take that. But if you take more the macro, and you kind of look down at it and sort of factor in environmental, I actually think it's going to go north of that. And I've had a Republican say that if they could get out of this with a 10-seat loss it would be a miracle. So, this kind of year the macro kind of works better. In normal years, it's the race-by-race count. So, I think it's going to be – they'll be losing more than 10 seats.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. We're pretty much out of time, so let me just ask you a final question. What do you think the final electoral vote will be? So, you need 270 votes to win. So, let's just go down. Charlie, let's go with you. How many do you think – you think Biden will win. How many votes do you think he will get?

MR. COOK: I think Biden will be closer to 400 than to 300 electoral votes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow. Mike?

MR. ALLEN: I never disagree with Charlie Cook on electoral votes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Gloria?

MS. BORGER: Not going to bite. I have absolutely – I have absolutely no idea. And I'm not going to bite on that one, David. Sorry, I can't.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Nikole, any biting on that?

MS. KILLION: I'd probably say the same too, since I'll be covering election night. What I can say, I believe our battleground tracker has the latest numbers at, like, 279 – I'm trying to look it up – 279 for Biden, 163 for Trump. So that's currently what CBS News is predicting on our battleground tracker. But, again, still hard to predict at this stage.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Well, let me just thank all of you – Mike, Gloria, Charlie, and Nikole, for a very interesting conversation. I will figure out in a couple weeks whether you're right or not. And we hope everybody fills out their ballots relating to this poll, and we'll see whether anybody is smarter than our panelists about what's likely to happen. But thank you all for participating. And I'd like to thank everybody who is our sponsors. And again, this will be on our website in a few moments. So, thank you all. Good day.

Mike Allen
Founder and Executive Editor, Axios Media

Mike Allen is a founder and executive editor of Axios Media. He is the author of the daily Axios AM and Axios PM newsletters.

Prior to Axios, Allen was the chief White House correspondent for *Politico* and *Time* magazine. He was also a reporter for *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, and the *Free Lance-Star* in Fredericksburg, Va.

Allen grew up in Orange County, Calif., and has a B.A. from Washington and Lee University.

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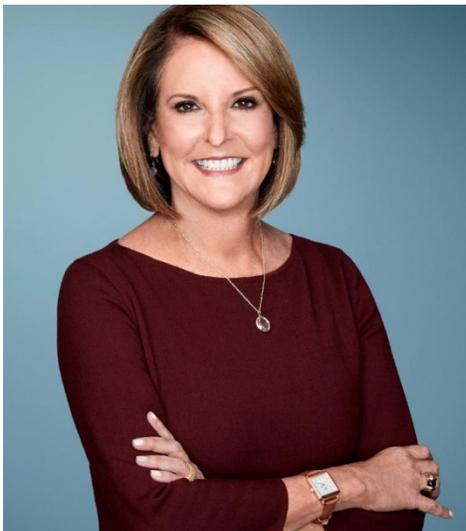
Gloria Borger
Chief Political Analyst, CNN

Gloria Borger is CNN's chief political analyst, appearing regularly on The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer and Anderson Cooper's AC360 and across the network's primetime programs. Borger plays an instrumental role in the network's daily coverage while reporting on a variety of political and breaking news stories, including midterm and presidential elections, major Supreme Court rulings, Congressional investigations, and more. Borger regularly conducts in-depth profile pieces on key players in policy and politics, including Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, and those involved in the Mueller investigation: Bob Mueller, Michael Cohen, Rod Rosenstein, and Bill Barr.

In September of 2016, Borger reported the documentaries; All Business: The Essential Donald Trump and Almost President: The Agony of Defeat. In the two-hour long documentary about the life of Donald Trump, Borger went beyond the campaign trail to report in-depth on his journey from childhood to his early years in Manhattan and Atlantic City, to primetime fame, to becoming the Republican nominee for President.

The hour-long documentary Almost President: The Agony of Defeat profiles former presidential nominees and how they lived through the greatest public failure in American life, losing the

American presidency. Borger interviewed Mitt Romney, John McCain, Michael Dukakis, and Walter Mondale who all described what it's like to live through this process and fail.

In October of 2015, Borger reported the hour-long documentary Bush v. Gore, the definitive story of the recount during the election of 2000 with exclusive insider stories from both sides.

In 2012, Borger reported CNN's 90-minute documentary on the life and career of Mitt Romney—his journey in politics and devotion to his Mormon faith. During this project, she traveled to France to report on Romney's missionary life and she conducted several in-depth interviews with Mitt Romney as well as his family. After the 2012 election, Borger conducted the first extended post-election interview with Romney and his wife Ann as they candidly discussed the campaign.

Borger also profiled House Budget Chairman Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) in 2012, before he became the GOP Vice Presidential nominee for Mitt Romney. Borger also interviewed Joe Biden exclusively prior to the second inauguration of President Obama.

Borger received an Emmy nomination for her 2010 special for CNN, The Odd Couple, in which she interviewed powerhouse Washington attorneys David Boies and Ted Olson. The two partisan political opposites teamed up in an unlikely legal alliance in support of same-sex marriage against California's Proposition 8. Borger revisited the topic again in 2013 when their case in support of same-sex marriage was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. The result was a 30-minute CNN special, Marriage Warriors: Showdown at the Supreme Court, which earned a first place 2014 National Headliner Award and the 2014 American Gavel Award from the American Judges Association.

In addition, Borger is the correspondent for an acclaimed series of in-depth specials, Gloria Borger Reports. As part of that series, Borger interviewed Vice President Joe Biden exclusively the day before the 2014 midterm elections, as well as a news-making interview with former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, an in-depth report on presidential dynasties and wide-ranging profiles on political stars and characters as diverse as progressive Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) to the legendary former Louisiana Governor, Edwin Edwards. The pieces run across all CNN platforms, and add value to the network's daily coverage.

Borger has been a prominent part of all recent CNN election coverage, and was pivotal to CNN's Emmy award-winning election night coverage in 2012. She also played a key role in the network's political coverage for the 2010 midterm elections, as well as the historic America Votes 2008 coverage, which earned CNN a Peabody Award.

Before joining CNN in September 2007, Borger was CBS News' national political correspondent and a contributor to CBS's Face the Nation, 60 Minutes II and the network's special events coverage. From 2002 to 2004, she was the co-anchor of CNBC's Capital Report. Borger began her professional career as a reporter at The Washington Star where she covered politics and co-authored a daily serial, eventually published as a book, Federal Triangle, a parody of political life in Washington. Borger was a political columnist for U.S. News & World Report and chief

congressional correspondent for Newsweek. Early in her career, Borger was awarded the Watson Traveling Fellowship to study the British press.

Borger graduated from Colgate University in Hamilton, N.Y., where she has served on the board of trustees.

CNN, www.cnn.com/profiles/gloria-borger

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

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.

Cook Political Report, cookpolitical.com/about/staff/charles-e-cook-jr

Nikole Killion
Correspondent, CBS News

Nikole Killion is a correspondent for CBS News based in Washington D.C. Killion reports for all CBS News broadcasts and platforms, including the "CBS Evening News," "CBS This Morning" and CBSN, the 24/7 digital streaming news service.

Previously, Killion was a correspondent for CBS Newspath, the Network's 24-hour television newsgathering service for CBS stations and broadcasters around the world.

Since joining CBS News, Killion landed one of the first interviews with both Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, following the congresswoman's endorsement of him for the 2020 presidential election. Killion has also contributed to CBS News coverage on a range of topics including the State of the Union and Virginia's political crisis in early 2019. She also led Newspath's coverage of the impeachment inquiry, the Democratic debates, the Mueller Report, the partial government shutdown and the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. She has traveled to major breaking news events including Hurricanes Michael and Dorian in Florida and the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting.

Killion joined CBS News in 2018 from Hearst Television's Washington bureau where she was a correspondent. A veteran D.C. journalist, Killion has covered every presidential campaign since the 2008 election and interviewed countless newsmakers, including former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama. She reported on the papal visits of Pope Francis and Pope Benedict to the United States. Her reporting on the opioid crisis was also featured in a special for Hearst's syndicated program, "Matter of Fact with Soledad O'Brien."

Prior to her years at Hearst, Killion covered the capital region as an anchor/reporter for WJLA-TV and NewsChannel 8 in Washington, D.C., and an anchor for WHAG-TV in Hagerstown, Maryland. She began her career at NBC News in New York.

Killion graduated from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. She is a member of the White House Correspondents' Association and the National Association of Black Journalists.

CBS News, www.cbsnews.com/team/nikole-killion/