



2015 Bipartisan Budget Act. He has held advisory positions at the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Treasury and with the Director of National Intelligence, and was Deputy Policy Director on Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential campaign.

Patti has a similarly long history on the Democratic side, serving as an advisor to the Obama-Biden presidential campaign in 2012 and as chief of staff for Vice Presidential operations during the 2008 general presidential election. She has also been a longtime senior advisor to Hillary Clinton and was the First Lady’s presidential campaign manager in 2007-2008 (the first Hispanic woman to lead a US presidential campaign) and Ms. Clinton’s Senate re-election campaign manager before that.

Political opposites as well as friends, Patti and Jonathan paint a clear picture of the campaign battles they see unfolding. Both freely admit that more about the upcoming elections is unknown than known. Yet a relatively small number of races, including in North Carolina and Michigan, are seen by both as key to predicting control of Washington.

# BETWEEN *the* AISLES

**P**OLITICAL CAMPAIGNS HAVE LONG BEEN painfully divisive, unfriendly and chaotic, changing direction on a dime to meet new conditions on the ground. This year, they have been thrown into tactical confusion by three simultaneous global crises—the pandemic, its resulting economic recession, and global civil rights unrest over the treatment of black people. Strategies and assumptions that seemed assured only months ago now appear strained or irrelevant. In the heat of this moment, Review Editor Kevin Helliker talked about that turmoil with Brunswick Partners Jonathan Burks and Patti Solis Doyle. Both have extensive experience helping to guide national political campaigns—on opposite sides.

Before joining Brunswick, Jonathan was Chief of Staff to Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, serving as the Speaker’s principal advisor on policy, strategy, and management and, previously, the Speaker’s National Security Advisor. As an advisor to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on budget issues, he was a principal negotiator of the

**KEVIN HELLIKER** speaks with Brunswick Partners **JONATHAN BURKS** and **PATTI SOLIS DOYLE**, both former advisors on national political campaigns (he Republican, she Democratic), about the US November elections.

Jonathan Burks, above left, served as Chief of Staff to Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. Patti Solis Doyle, right, managed or advised national campaigns for Barack Obama, Joe Biden and Hillary Rodham Clinton.



PHOTOGRAPHS: TOP, ERIC THAYER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/R. RIGHT, AP PHOTO/CHARLES REX ARBOGAST

**Amid the unrest sparked by George Floyd's death at the hands of police, some are saying Joe Biden must pick an African-American as his vice-presidential candidate. Is that your view and who should he pick?**

**PATTI:** Even before the civil unrest, I think Vice President Biden was under pressure to pick an African American, given that African Americans in South Carolina saved his flailing candidacy. After South Carolina, he went on to win primary after primary after primary without any real presence in those states. It was an unbelievable comeback that, again, was led by African Americans. And now, after George Floyd, I think he's facing incredible pressure to choose an African American running mate. He has already committed to picking a woman, so some of the African American women who were on the list have jumped to the top—Kamala Harris, Stacey Abrams, Val Demings.

That aside, having worked on a couple of VP selection committees, the most important quality in a running mate is that person's ability to actually do the job of the presidency. It's important that that person's ideology and feelings about public policy and how government should be run align with the candidate. That's really the number one thing.

**JONATHAN:** Having been around for two VP selections, that last element—a personal feel between the candidate and the VP selectee—is critical. If you are in a situation where you really believe you're going to be president, what you're looking for is both a partner that you can work with for the next four years and someone who would carry on with your goals and legacy if something were to happen.

**At a time when every month seems to be five years long, is it even fair to ask which presidential candidate is going to win an election that's five months away?**

**JONATHAN:** No, not at all, so I refuse to engage further. (LAUGHTER) We're all looking at a relatively small number of states that we think could swing the election. I've got seven states that are likely to decide the election. The most recent polling has Trump down in six of those seven—Arizona, Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—outside the margin of error. The one exception is North Carolina.

It's really early. There's a lot that could and no doubt will happen. But the president is trying to do something that's very hard, which is to win a second electoral college victory while losing the popular vote. That's an inherently hard thing to do once, let

**"I THINK THERE'S  
A FIGHTING  
CHANCE AT A SPLIT  
SENATE. IF SO, AND  
IF BIDEN WINS,  
THAT MEANS  
THAT DEMOCRATS  
CONTROL THE  
SENATE BECAUSE  
OF VICE PRESIDENT  
KAMALA HARRIS  
OR STACY ABRAMS  
OR VAL DEMINGS."**

PATTI SOLIS DOYLE

alone twice. So I don't think things are shaping up particularly well for him at this stage.

**PATTI:** Not only do we need to look at that small number of states where the election will be won or lost, but also at a handful of counties and districts within those states. The other thing to watch is voters by demographic and constituency. The president has a significant problem with women voters. And he has a significant problem with independent voters.

Obviously both sides need to get their base out in order to win this election. And right now, both bases are very, very energized. We know President Trump's base is going to come out. If the Democratic base comes out just as strong, then the significant lead Democrats hold—at least right now—with women and independents is a bad thing for Trump.

**JONATHAN:** Regarding the current state of civil unrest, that could end up helping Trump. With women voters in particular, there's a flight to safety that comes into play when there is unrest like this. To the extent that Trump is able to position himself as the safer choice, or the candidate of law and order, that may well help him with demographics with whom he is having difficulty gaining traction.

**Patti, in your recent interview with Haley Stevens, she talked about the challenge of campaigning at a time when the coronavirus has all but eliminated retail campaigning. How does that affect the conventions and the presidential campaign?**

**PATTI:** I tell you, Kevin, I worry about it every day. In a race this close—and it will be this close in November—we're going to win by the margins. Retail campaigning, voter engagement, voter turnout are absolutely crucial. In this current environment, I don't know what's going to happen. It took me two and a half hours in line to vote in the DC primary. I don't think that bodes well for November. Clearly there's been a lot of effort and resources poured into voting by mail on the national level. But again, I don't know how that's going to play out.

On the local level, there are people in very difficult districts. Haley Stevens, in Michigan District 11, was able in 2018 to turn that very red district blue by doing what you mentioned—knocking on doors, talking to individual voters, seeing them where they are, in grocery store parking lots or wherever.

She's now inhibited in doing that. She is finding new ways—calling them on the phone, wearing her mask and staying six feet from them, not going in crowded areas but getting out there. We'll see. But she's having difficulties. She's concerned.





**Jonathan, do these restrictions favor the incumbent?**

**JONATHAN:** It probably favors the Trump campaign's approach, which is heavily digital, data-driven. The tack they were already planning to take is less affected by restrictions on door-to-door campaigning. But one of the key data sources that they were depending on—that they've made a great deal of hay out of maximizing—is the rallies. I think that's one of the reasons you're seeing the president and the campaign pushing hard to get back to being able to do those rallies. That's a prime data source for identifying new voters for them.

**The Senate currently stands at 53 Republicans, 45 Democrats, two independents. Any chance that the Senate shifts to the Democrats?**

**PATTI:** There's a better chance today than three months ago or even two months ago. I'm looking at four specific states: Colorado, which is looking very, very good for Democrats; Arizona is increasingly looking very good for Democrats; North Carolina is a toss-up right now; and Maine is also a toss-up. Clearly its hard to win all four, but if they do, we're in very good shape.

We will be at a split Senate, given Democrats will likely lose Alabama. But then we also have some possibilities in Montana and Georgia.

I think there's a fighting chance at a split Senate. If so, and if Biden wins, that means that Democrats control the Senate because of Vice President Kamala Harris or Stacey Abrams or Val Demings.

In a 2007 campaign meeting, Presidential Candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton, right, sits across from her Campaign Manager, Patti Solis Doyle.

**JONATHAN:** It's not a great map for Republicans. In the last cycle, a disproportionate number of Democratic seats were up for election.

This cycle, the vast majority of competitive races are Republican-held seats. In addition to the ones Patti listed, I think you also need to watch what happens in Montana, where you have a popular former governor facing off against a popular senator. That's one of those places that is more naturally Republican, but Democrats have had some success in the Senate.

And you need to look at Michigan, where you have a lackluster Democratic incumbent Senator, Gary Peters, facing a charismatic Republican. Outside of Alabama, that's probably the best opportunity for a pickup for Republicans.

**PATTI:** Yeah, that's right. I forgot Michigan, that's a very good point.

**In the House, the Democrats gained 41 seats in 2018, flipping the House. Any chance that big of a switch goes the other way this time?**

**JONATHAN:** Right now there are 30 House Democrats representing seats that Donald Trump won in 2016. So you've got a presidential campaign apparatus that is going to be working to maximize turnout among his base. That gives House Republicans a real chance of taking back the House.

It would be historically unusual for the House majority to flip back and forth like this. It hasn't happened since the 1950s. Also, the reason there are 30 Democrats in those Trump-won districts is

that subsequent to the 2016 election, the president's popularity among suburban voters has just plummeted. Reversing that is the challenge. But it's certainly possible.

**PATTI:** I'm going to disagree. (LAUGH) While anything's possible, certainly, it's going to be very, very hard for Republicans to win back the House. The key factors in House races are money and the right candidates for the district. You can have vastly different districts within one state.

What made the Democrats so successful in 2018 was their candidate recruitment was stellar. They weren't very good at that in 2016. In 2018, they were able to really recruit candidates in these red districts who spoke to their constituencies, spoke to the makeup of the district.

I just don't see that this time around for Republicans. It's sort of a lackluster field of candidates. And from what I've read the fundraising is not as robust as Democrats at this point.

**JONATHAN:** Candidates matter intensely in the House races. But I think that's a bigger factor in off-year elections when there's not a presidential candidate to drive turnout. A lot more Republican voters, who may not have been terribly enthused to come out in the midterm, may come out this time.

Patti's right, there's a big fundraising disparity. One of the challenges of COVID is how do you raise money in this kind of environment? But, again, with so much of the turnout being driven at the presidential level, even that's going to be less of a factor than it would otherwise.

#### Is there a race, Senate or House, that is of particular interest to each of you?

**PATTI:** I'm watching North Carolina. Not only the Senate race, but how that affects the presidential vote and the electoral college. That race is Tillis, the incumbent, versus Cunningham. Democrats spent a lot of effort in recruiting Cunningham and right now, it is neck and neck. If Cunningham can pull it out and we end up winning that state, we win the presidency. I think that's the state that Democrats are going to pour resources into.

**JONATHAN:** I'd also pick a Senate race: the Georgia special election for Senate. Georgia's the only state in the country that's going to have two Senate elections this November. In the one, it's expected that Senator Perdue will be reelected easily.

But the other is competitive, where Republican Senator Loeffler is facing a scandal [over stock trades during the coronavirus outbreak]. She's facing a strong challenge from fellow Republican Doug

"WITH WOMEN  
VOTERS IN  
PARTICULAR,  
THERE'S A FLIGHT  
TO SAFETY THAT  
COMES TO PLAY  
WHEN THERE IS  
UNREST LIKE THIS.  
THAT COULD  
END UP HELPING  
TRUMP."

JONATHAN BURKS

Collins, a current member of the House. [Governor Kemp appointed Kelly Loeffler to the seat after Senator Isakson retired last year for health reasons. The special election will be for the balance of his term, which ends in 2022.] If someone gets above 50 percent, they win. If not, the top two vote getters head into a runoff, I think in December. Right now Collins is in the lead. But Loeffler is more an establishment favorite. If the president decides to get engaged in the state primary, that could prove decisive.

So I think it's going to be a really fascinating race for political junkies, even though in either event you end up with a Republican holding the seat.

#### Is there anything we haven't talked about that grabs your attention?

**PATTI:** Joe Biden being in his basement. (LAUGHTER) This is someone I've worked for and I know well. What Joe Biden has that has worked for him in his political career for 35 years now is his ability to connect with people. It's his ability to put his hand on the shoulder of a voter or someone in pain, that's who he is. That's what makes people love Joe—both Democrats and Republican.

He can't do that right now. It doesn't look like he'll be able to do that at all, or much of that through November. I'm wondering how that will affect his ability to really connect with voters. That keeps me up at night.

**JONATHAN:** I'm not convinced that, if I were advising the Biden campaign, I'd want Biden out on the stump. Reelection is almost always a referendum on the incumbent. You might just be better off being a blank slate that people can cast their hopes and dreams on, and hope that they're dissatisfied with the incumbent.

**PATTI:** That's a very good point. Certainly, in my view, Donald Trump has not handled the pandemic well, has not handled this civil unrest well at all. This election in my view will be a referendum on those two things.

But the other side can't just be in the basement, they have to offer a vision. They have to offer a hope. They have to offer something that voters can connect with. Joe Biden is good at that, he just hasn't had the ability to do it as of yet. He's telling people, "I'm following the science." So if the science is telling us, "You can't be in a crowd of 5,000 people," then he can't.

But Donald Trump can, because he doesn't necessarily follow the science. And that's troublesome. ♦

**KEVIN HELLIKER**, a Pulitzer Prize-winning former Wall Street Journal writer, is Editor of the Brunswick Review.