

## **Rick Klein, Political Director, ABC News**

### **Megan Cloherty, Producer, It's All Journalism**

Welcome to It's all Journalism. I'm Megan Cloherty joined by co-producers Anna Miars, Julie O'Donoghue and Michael O'Connell. And today we have Rick Klein with us. Rick is political director at ABC News. He is currently senior Washington editor for World News Tonight with Diane Sawyer. He also co-hosts [Top Line](#), a political webcast, that is daily isn't it?

### **Rick Klein, Political Director, ABC News**

It's weekly now. But we'll go back to that.

### **Megan Cloherty**

We'll go back to that. It's weekly! He's a regular guest on Fox News and NPR. A graduate of Princeton, Rick spent his early career at the Dallas Morning News and the Boston Globe. Thanks for being here.

### **Rick Klein**

My pleasure.

### **Michael O'Connell, Producer, It's All Journalism**

And you just came from ABC, you were doing a show.

### **Rick Klein**

Yeah, we just did This Week roundtable, actually my maiden appearance on that roundtable, so that was fun.

### **Megan Cloherty**

What was the topic of conversation?

### **Rick Klein**

A little bit about the Obama health care law and the ramifications of that delay. Big story this week. Immigration, which of course, is consuming Washington for much of the summer. And then just wrapping President Obama's trip to Africa and the unique joint appearance with President Bush over in Tanzania.

### **Megan Cloherty**

So lets start with -- and we're going to back track big time here -- how your career got started. You graduated with a degree in politics. Did you always know this is where you wanted to be in Washington covering this?

### **Rick Klein**

Yes. I joke about this but, I remember watching George Will like it was a spectator sport on the This Week roundtable ya know? In junior high and high school. I always knew I wanted to do

political journalism. At an earlier age than that, I was just interested in politics. I was that kid who was coloring electoral college maps when Michael Dukakis was getting blown out.

I wanted something to do with politics. As time went by, political journalism seemed like a more attractive option. It just kind of, for me, converged a lot of my different interests. Politics being one of course, also sports, the excitement and competition of politics and media/broadcasting as well as print. I was editor in chief of my college newspaper, "The Daily Princetonian." I also worked at the college radio station broadcast basketball games, and football games and baseball games and that sort of thing. It just fit at the right nexus of things for me.

## **Michael O'Connell**

Like George Will, do you have a weird poetic love for baseball?

## **Rick Klein**

I do as a matter of fact. And I'll also admit – I have a lot of signed baseballs – but only one in my office and it's from George Will. I got it in college when he came to speak there, so. But yes, I'm a Yankees fan, unapologetically so and I've adopted the Nationals as a team since living in Washington. They are my National league team.

## **Megan Cloherty**

So you started in TV, but then you went to print ...

## **Rick Klein**

No actually, I started as a print reporter entirely. I did some broadcasting in college, but I went into print reporting exclusively at the Dallas Morning News. This was the late '90s, the job market was pretty good. People were getting hired out of internships, that sort of thing, so I got an internship in Dallas after I graduated college and drove from New York halfway across the country to Dallas and set up shop there. I just did Metro reporting – cops and courts type stuff.

I had some exposure to TV then because the local ABC affiliate, actually, WFAA had joined with the Dallas Morning News, they had the same ownership group Belo, and started something called the TXCN, Texas Cable News. Which is one of the probably one of the earlier regional cable outlets. So they were desperate for content, early on, and hey'd have Dallas Morning News reporters on to talk about their stories. So you'd go to a little newsroom flash cam – which are now ubiquitous – every newsroom has one. But there weren't many in 1998-1999 that had them like that. So that was a little bit ahead of its time.

But then I was a print reporter, I got a job at the Boston Globe in late 2000 covered state house, city hall stuff, came to Washington to cover the Bush campaign for the Globe and did some TV around the edges. But it was never my primary gig. And it actually wasn't my primary gig when I got hired at ABC in 2007. I didn't really feel like I was working in television for the first few years because I was writing for the website. It was like I was a print reporter that just happened to be in a place that made a lot of television. So I did some TV, again, around the edges, I've always done cable hits, but I kind of transitioned more toward the TV thing, but I still have a lot of the writing and everything else that goes involved in journalism – you name it.

## Megan Cloherty

We were talking when Rick came in about [The Note](#), which really kind of has ... started small, I don't want to say small – but it really has become this huge thing where there's multiple writers . And now it's generally regarded as a source every morning for a lot of politicians in D.C. Tell us about your taking over that in 2007 and just what it's about generally.

## Rick Klein

Yeah, I think there's a lesson there sort of a microcosm for how journalism evolves is how a product like that is created in the first place and then evolves. It started actually as an internal newsletter that one of my predecessors political director Mark Halperin started at ABC News and he would just put together every morning kind of a round up the top political stories with his take and people looked at it and said, "Hey this is pretty good. Maybe we should do something with it." So it just started putting it on the website. It grew an audience, and sponsorships and money followed it, lots of clicks, and it certainly grew in influence and by the time I took it over in 2007, it was I think kind of the premiere morning tip sheet. It started out as the only one. Since then NBC started doing a very similar one, CNN, The Washington Post, Politico, there were a lot of folks who kind of entered that space. And I think we've evolved over time, in part because of that, I mean largely because of that. I think journalism has changed so fast, so much in the last 10-15 years. That you can't keep a product static and expect that the audience is going to follow whether that's World News with Diane Sawyer, or an online politics tip sheet or a podcast – everything has to change with the audience and changing viewing and reading habits.

## Megan Cloherty

It's funny too. When you read it, it's broken up in different ways – what's buzz worthy or whatever. It's not just the five things you need to know.

## Rick Klein

Right.

## Megan Cloherty

There's opinion in there too, which I think is sort of is different.

## Rick Klein

I think one of the things that we're trying to get at a little bit is they idea that the same dynamic of a political roundtable – where people come at it with a point of view and they argue a little bit. That to me is the best, again getting back to the sports metaphor, which you can take too far and you can get critiqued for, I think politics is about the game of it, the process of it, the argument of it. There's no end goal that we're going to be dealing with politics, because we've got all the perfect laws and the perfect system in place. It is the process. It is getting there. You have to relish it. And I think our readers and our viewers do relish the figures, the issues, the policy and the players. It's all part of that in this town that we call home.

## Michael O'Connell

You're in D.C. Do you sometimes feel that you're only talking to people in D.C.?

### **Megan Cloherty**

The bubble.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Yeah. Or do you feel there's as much intensity beyond the Beltway as you're sort of experiencing?

### **Rick Klein**

I think there's layers of an audience for any outlet, you name it. I think there's an inner layer of true insiders. They, for whom, this is an important piece of work everyday and everything we do is viewed by them and seen by them and read by them on that level. I think you have a definitely larger, kind of scattered universe of real junkies. You know how people who are really into weather watch the Weather Channel all day, whether there's extreme weather or not. We have political junkies who are watching what we are doing. And they'd watch ESPN if they're into sports as much, so that's a universe.

And then a significantly larger universe, which is always the challenge, is to reach people who maybe they don't have a disdain for politics, because they should probably go elsewhere if they have a true hatred of it, but you know, a casual interest in it. It ramps up around election time we see our numbers jump through the roof around the time of an election and then they drop down again. People engage as they see fit. So to get those very much more casual viewers and readers is always the challenge. We know we're going to have the core of the insiders and the junkies, but to get beyond that. And what we try to do at ABC News is to very much get beyond that. Because let's be honest, the kind of numbers that a network counts in aren't going to be influenced by the insider group. If another 10,000 insiders, even, which is a huge number of insiders are watching, that's not going to change the ratings. That's not going to change the financing of a website. But hundreds of thousands, now you're talking. That's I think, what we do. We try to do in terms of how we communicate these things is to stay out of the real weedsy policy stuff, the senators you never heard of, that kind of thing, just people and issues that have real impact and to make it relatable.

### **Megan Cloherty**

As I mentioned in the intro, Rick is, uh, oversees the content for World News Tonight out Washington. And is it hard to stay on top of the politics thing, because obviously that's like your bread and butter for most of the day. And then, World News comes on at 6:30 so at like what, 4:30 everything just goes crazy. Does it pull you away at all, do you have trouble balancing that or is it, ya know, all planning?

### **Rick Klein**

Well, we have talented producers like your dad, Jack Cloherty.

### **Megan Cloherty**

My dad works there everyone.

## **Rick Klein**

Full disclosure. And actually he does something that's not politics at all – part of Washington – Justice Department and all the criminal justice world of Washington. There's another level of Washington. It does to some degree, but it challenges us to think broadly about things. Because you have that very small window of time. World News with Diane Sawyer is 22 minutes. And in that 22 minutes, they've got to do the weather story, they've got to do some health news, not got too but often. Some foreign news is often in there, something heart-warming, something cute, something fun. There's a lot that's competing for that 22 minutes of time. So, I could fill it with politics every night. But they don't let me do that very often. Maybe on election day or election eve but that's about it. Mostly, we'll have one spot to maybe two that talks about politics that really gets into it. So you have to make the most of that opportunity, make the most of that medium. And to use what it is to have that 22 minutes of precious television time. So it does, it forces us, no matter where you work at ABC, it forces you to think very deeply about every second of television and what works for the medium that we're producing for.

## **Megan Cloherty**

And that audience, right?

## **Rick Klein**

Yep, definitely.

## **Michael O'Connell**

Where does digital fit into this? I'll ask you in two parts – you were on a print to a broadcast track. At one point did you suddenly realize, 'Whats going on here? There's this digital thing playing a larger part.' And how does that sort of affect what you do now?

## **Rick Klein**

It's almost trite to say it, but digital is everything for me. The reason I say that is, I got into print reporting to become a print reporter. The business was changing then. Certainly there was a digital component. Things were very much in flux by the late '90s, when I first got into the business. You could still be a print reporter. And that's it. You could still be a TV reporter today. I didn't go into ABC news saying I want to be a television reporter, I want to be a broadcast journalist. I don't think of myself that way. I think of myself, the phrase I use is platform agnostic.

I don't care, literally don't care how you consume your news. I want to get it to you however that way is. If that is purely online or mobile, digital, if that is just through the television airwaves, or radio airwaves, if that's just print, I want to find a way to get you there. If that's going to be just something into your head, I want to be part of that technology.

So the technology has always been secondary to me. That's what digital allows. It's also opened a lot of doors for people, myself included, who wouldn't have been thought of traditionally as a TV reporter. And I don't think I would have been able to make the transition from print to TV just on my considerable good looks or my wonderful camera presence. I didn't have any sense of

what that was. And that wasn't what I was going for either. I think at that time it was the idea of having someone that could live in the digital space, that would understand what the digital technologies were and how they change and how you have to change to adapt to them that I think made me attractive to them and continues to keep me employed by ABC News.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Do you think there has been as far as by management or production that the perception has changed of the newscaster or the broadcaster? That it doesn't matter if the person is primarily a digital reporter if they've got something important or interesting to say they we're going to want to have them on?

### **Rick Klein**

Yeah, we're getting there. Look, I think TV is still TV. And what we do at ABC News, the most important thing is still the thing that reaches the most viewers. But all that said, we've got other things – you mentioned Top Line which is our webcast that we do in partnership with Yahoo! News, the numbers that we get of people watching this little 5-6 minute segment will rival and beat daytime cable often. We're getting more viewers than CNN would at 2 o'clock in the afternoon on these little things we put together. That's another way to reach.

But I think the business is changing, the organization is changing along these lines. I think the smartest journalists now, whether they're 22, 42 or 62, are thinking along these lines and trying to figure out how they can craft a full persona that is not just the person you see in front of the building at 6:30 with a good standup or not just the person that has the byline on the front page of The New York Times or the Washington Post -- that there has to be a full digital integration around everything you do. And that your personal brand as a reporter depends on reaching people in lots of different ways. The only exception that I think continues to that is the real big name anchors. Diane Sawyer does a lot on Twitter and a lot on Facebook, but she would exist as Diane Sawyer without that. But I think just about any other, anyone short of the anchors of the major broadcast, needs to engage needs to find ways of meeting the viewer, meeting the reader wherever they want to be met.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Well, and I can think of a couple local TV anchors who are very much about communicating and reaching their audience and are doing stuff on Twitter all the time.

We were talking before we started recording about Twitter and about the role it plays and what you do, you know, can you sort of elaborate on that?

### **Rick Klein**

Look, I'm going to date myself a little bit. My first job at a newspaper, we had email of course.

### **Michael O'Connell**

I remember Linotype. So ...

**Rick Klein**

We had email. But there was only one computer in the newsroom you could get your email on. Everyone had to line up and check their email. Honestly. This was 1998 in Dallas. And you went to check once or twice a day, you went over there.

**Megan Cloherty**

And it did this eeww --ewww (making dial-up sound)

**Rick Klein**

No, it was a better connection than that. I'm not that old, but close. Email has obviously changed the way we worked as reporters, as have cell phones and text messaging and all that. I had a pager and had to pull over to the side of the road and use a pay phone when I first started working in Dallas.

**Michael O'Connell**

Oh my God.

**Rick Klein**

Exactly. But Twitter has changed the way I do my job in even a more profound way than that. I don't put Facebook in the same category, at least for me personally. For other people it is.

Twitter is an absolutely essential part of my everyday existence professionally and personally. It is my news aggregator. It is the most efficient way that I can have to make sure I'm seeing the stories I need to see. I can just pull up TweetDeck and see the people I follow, I'm not going to miss anything. I'm going to see the news as it breaks, I'm going to see the important stories even in small local places. It's all there for me. It's a way for me to engage with sources. There are multiple members of Congress that I have direct message relationships with and I don't mean in the Anthony Weiner sense of relationships at all.

People that I normally wouldn't be able to have to penetrate several layers of spokespeople to even be able to make contact with senator so-and-so who I can just send a direct message to and hear directly from the source back and get confirmation on something or a phone call back on something. So there's that.

Also, just in terms of the insider audience, everyone that operates in my sphere of politics and media in Washington is on Twitter. So connecting with each other, communicating with each other.

It's helped build my personal exposure, my personal brand. The fact that I know the people that I'm out there talking to. It is just ... I can't even remember how I did my job without it. Four years ago I didn't have it. Five years ago, I didn't have it. So it's remarkable how fast it's happened.

That, to me, is an example of needing to embrace a new piece of communications as it develops. We've gone, news organization has been moving in a digital directions for a long time, but now

with Twitter, we put a hashtag up at the bottom of every ABC News broadcast - no matter what, This Week, Nightline or GMA [Good Morning America] or World News. It's there, it's part of what we do, it's part of how we communicate and again, I can't imagine going backwards and being told you can't use this thing anymore.

### **Michael O'Connell**

I still find it amazing that there are people who are resistant still to Twitter -- I occasionally run into -- 'Oh that's just people posting things about their lunch.' It's ridiculous.

### **Rick Klein**

I try not to post about lunch.

### **Julie O'Donoghue, Producer, It's All Journalism**

I listen -- full disclosure -- I don't watch a lot of television news. But I listen to all the political talk shows on CSPAN and have for years. And This Week is absolutely my favorite one. I think it's the best one for a lot of different reasons. I have a couple questions about it. One is, I want to know how you assemble your panel, because I think it's the best panel.

### **Rick Klein**

In terms of the panel, we put a lot of thought terms of who we put in there. One thing you look for is diversity in every sense. In ideological, in you know, in race, in ethnicity, in background as well. Male and female and all that. You want to make sure you're not just talking to people who will present one point of view and one thing we think about is people who are good foils for each other. If there's a very good Republican member of Congress that we want to have on. Is there a good Democratic member of Congress that we want to pair them with.

The classic is James Carville and Mary Matalin. They're a natural. They've had that schtick going on for a long time. You know what you're going to get with them. We also sprinkle in our own people as part of that. I mean, George Will has been part of the program for a long time. People like Cokie Roberts and Sam Donaldson are institutions in Washington and you know you're going to get really strong material from them. Involving our own reporters, if George Stephanopolous is anchoring, you're as likely to see Jon Karl, who's our White House correspondent who fills in for him sometimes is part of that. But basically, you want to get the most interesting discussion you can get. And I'm glad to hear you like it on radio as well.

### **Julie O'Donoghue**

I love it.

### **Rick Klein**

To me, you can tell a lot about television by just listening to it. And the best discussions should be transferrable to radio. Whether or not you get the full effect of George Will without seeing him, you know, you are getting a sense of who these people are and what they're coming from.



So we also, another piece we try to mix in is people with an insider experience or current insiders. We like having sitting office holders as part of the roundtable, people that are candidates for office who are high profile who as part of that, people who have written interesting things and bring an interesting perspective. But, it is a huge puzzle and challenge every week to find the right four or five people for the roundtable, which is among the most popular parts of the show. It's surprising to me in a sense, that every cable show does that every hour of the day in some way debating the fact that people are still willing to on Sunday mornings interested in what a collection of four or five people have to say about the issues of the week. But it has a remarkable persistence. And I think it is because of the good casting and the good conversation. Obviously, the topics are important too and choosing what you want to talk about is. All of that, they think about it very, very carefully. George thinks about it carefully.

## **Julie O'Donoghue**

It used to bother me a long time ago we'll say, that George Stephanopolous, like I kind of I resented him a little bit, because he didn't start out as a journalist and yet he's very, very good at his job. So I wanted to talk to you about what you think of people who are coming out of the political realm who've become journalists. I think he's probably the best example, the most successful example.

## **Rick Klein**

For the record, George doesn't bother me at all. I love him.

And I mean that, I adore the man. Actually what he did was a little bit ahead of its time. It's become much more common practice now to see people moving between the spheres of politics and political communication. Maybe not at the level he did where he went full in and is now an anchor at ABC. But the idea that, I mean, we just saw CNN hire Kevin Madden and Stephanie Cutter and Newt Gingrich by the way. Stephanie and Kevin are good friends of mine and I've covered when they worked on campaigns for many many years and now they're going to be pundits essentially. So you see more of that. People have talked about Joe Scarborough running for office; Chris Matthews running for office. Tim Russert came out of that same tradition, he came out as an aid from Capitol Hill just like George Stephanopolus got his start. It's happening more. You know, when George did it in the late '90s, he transitioned into it. He started really in the pundit role and became more of a reporter. But you know, I see first hand that same fire that he brought to politics brought to bear on journalism and it's really productive.

To understand it at that level, I've often thought you know I wish I had done a stint on the Hill before I got into journalism to chart a career path. Things have worked out great for me, I have no complaints. But if I could have said at age 21 instead of going and covering cops for the Dallas Morning News, if I had gone and worked on the Hill as a junior press aid or something, it may have helped my development, my understanding even to this day of how stories are covered. There's a lot less of a stigma attached to that. Now, although it's not an easy transition for anyone to go from that world to this one.

## Megan Cloherty

I was going to say, they're hiring people now who are experts, not necessarily experts at television or experts in reporting, print. They're experts in their field and what they're talking about. It's changed.

## Rick Klein

Yeah. That's actually a huge lesson that I try to impart on young journalists all the time is that you're better off with a specialty of some sort. To be the person on health care financing right now would actually be really interesting and that will make you a hire-able commodity if you know you're good at it. G.A.'s, there's nothing wrong with being a general assignment reporter. I've been it and there's something about just going out and doing whatever, but like the idea that you can drill down into something and understand that it is going to make you hire-able forever and makes you much more marketable. I think the idea of just going for jobs that put you in a better position to hone in on a specialty just can be a way to build a compelling career.

## Michael O'Connell

A word you were throwing around a couple of times was "brand." How important is it to develop "the brand." Maybe you don't have to be a "news anchor" brand. You as a journalist or a broadcaster coming forward to develop who you are.

## Rick Klein

I think it's more important than ever. I think we all have employers and most of us — and you can be a freelancer and a "freelance brand — but most of us do have employers. But I feel like that part of the job matters less than it ever did. Certainly, than it has in my memory. I feel like in a previous generation if you were the White House correspondent for The New York Times or ABC News, that was itself enough to ... that was your ticket to the big dance. Now I think there are people with much less esteemed titles who are more influential in that sphere and I think if you are a White House correspondent for The New York Times, you have to think about what the brand really is and where you extend it to and what does it mean for you as a fully formed journalist. And what appears in the pages of The New York Times or on the airwaves of ABC News is just a slice of it. And so, not to say that your employer is not important, we work for these big companies that pay us for a reason, to produce for them. But, I think the most successful journalists in a generation going forward are going to be those who have a way to marry the professional brand and that personal brand in a productive way.

## Michael O'Connell

And I think, thanks to things like Twitter and Facebook, where you're actually building an identity and then linking that identity to what your career is.

## Rick Klein

Right.

## Michael O'Connell

And what your specialty is and that, I think, naturally sort of grows from that.

## Rick Klein

It's easier to do than ever because of that. Because ... I don't need to go through any hoops to just post something right now on Twitter and that's part of who I am. And that's part of what that brand is and you know that the number of people who are following me on Twitter that might just be a slice of the total number of people that reading are your stories or seeing you on TV or online, but it's an important slice and it kind of keeps that conversation going constantly.

## Michael O'Connell

The other question that I wanted to ask you is about elections. You said you came to D.C. to cover the Bush campaign?

## Rick Klein

Yeah, the Bush campaign '04.

## Michael O'Connell

Things have changed quite a lot in the last few elections. What's your perception of that?

## Rick Klein

I had it easy. I think that that '04 campaign was probably the last one where reporters can go out there and expect to have a good time. Not to say I wasn't working very hard, cause I was. But, again, in the category of dating myself, I went out on the campaign and I wrote a story a day. Whatever campaign stop would happen as close to my deadline, which would happen around 6 or 7 o'clock as possible, I would hit send on a final story and — that was dial up modems in a lot of these campaign stops at the time, but sometimes it was WiFi, sometimes it was not. And I would send it and I would be done. Unless someone tripped on the podium, I could enjoy the last stop of the night and have a drink on the plane at 11 o'clock at night as we're flying.

I feel bad for the reporters who are doing it now, because you have to be tweeting constantly and blogging and updating and there's always another deadline and there's no such thing as just being done for the day. Politics is moving so fast and so much faster than it did. 2008 was intense. 2012 was crazy intense. It scares me to think about what 2016's going to be like.

Another phrase that I use a lot is 'Politics is being conducted faster than the speed of thought.' And I think that we are there, unfortunately, fortunately, whatever you want to say. We're there and I don't know a way back. I don't know how you put that genie back in because every demand is to make it faster, to make the bite sizes even smaller and to speed up the cycle. It's just a lot harder, just physically demanding to be a reporter even than it was two election cycles ago.

## Michael O'Connell

Are we getting better journalism from that? Are we getting better government from that?

## Rick Klein

I don't know. I don't think it's related to the quality of the journalism necessarily. I think there's still a lot of good journalism that's being done as part of this. Some of them are good tweets, honestly. I don't think it's by itself making worse journalism. I would say that it's more of a demand on reporters' time to the extent that people that would be working on really, really exciting profiles or really good television pieces. If they're spending their time tweeting nothingness instead, then, yes, it's hurting the end work product. But, I'm also not among those who would just say like be done with all this stuff and say we're overtweeting because we could get better stuff somewhere else. There is actually productive stuff that is happening in the Twitter conversation and blogs and some of the creative things that are being done.

Whether we're getting better government? I don't know. I mean, I'm personally distressed by the dysfunction that surrounds Washington and I don't know that the type of media we have covering it is changing it that much. I don't think that the way things are being covered right now is making for better governance by itself. I don't know if it's making it for worse. I think there's a lot of complicated reasons for that. And I think that the speeding up of the news cycle, the 24-hour news cycle doesn't even describe it. News cycles last seconds and every second of the day is another news cycle in a sense.

I don't even know what I'm missing, cause I haven't checked my Twitter feed since this podcast started. There's something else that's happening out there, literally. I still have this strange sensation, the only time I'm really disconnected, other than sleeping, which, you know, that can be interrupted by a lot of things, your phone ringing or your kid crying, is when you're on a plane. When I'm on a plane now, the deluge of emails that I've missed when I come in, the numbers start popping up on the BlackBerry, one, two, three, four ... 450, 500 emails that I then have to wade through to see what I missed. And in all that time, how much useful information or necessary information? Not much. Not much happened.

## Megan Cloherty

Tell us about, obviously, you're following politicians and people in the know on Twitter. Putting you on the spot, who would be some good people to follow as far as like content?

## Rick Klein

You want politicians or political journalists?

## Megan Cloherty

Yeah, I know (Sen.) [Chuck Grassley](#) (R-Iowa) is good because he's funny.

## **Rick Klein**

Chuck Grassley's great because he's honest and he's doing it himself. Those are always the best and you want people who are going to be themselves. If they're just linking to press releases, I can get that lots of other places.

(Sen.) [Claire McCaskill](#) (D-Mo.) was one of the early ones who was doing it really well. She kept people updated on her diet and lots of her travels. I always found that to be entertaining. There's some House members who've gotten in trouble, and again, not just (former Rep.) Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) in terms of what they posted, because they can be a little too honest and then they have to go delete it. I'm thinking about Congressman [\(Steve\) Cohen](#) (D-Tenn.) who revealed himself to have had a daughter from years ago based on tweets that they sent out. And I guess those are interesting and good to follow.

To me, Twitter works for engagement. If it's just people sending links to the stories they wrote or the appearances they're on or "Hey, check me out. Later tonight I'm going to be on Fox." That's just not that interesting. The real people that get it, and fortunately, there are fewer as time goes by because, if I was working for a politician, I would take Twitter off his or her cell phone really fast because there are very few good things that can happen out of it.

[Cory Booker](#), I should mention. Cory Booker has probably made the best and most interesting use of Twitter there is. If you don't follow him on Twitter, well, if you live in Newark (N.J), you have to follow him on Twitter. He will literally respond to reports of potholes and "Here's my cell phone. Call me with more details on that problem you had with billing at the hospital or something." That to me is ... he's the mayor of the city.

## **Michael O'Connell**

Public service.

## **Rick Klein**

And he's serving the people and that's what it should be. That's perfect. Most politicians don't think like that. Most don't.

## **Megan Cloherty**

So, Twitter, you said you can't imagine doing your job without it. It does drive content. Have you broken things on Twitter?

## **Rick Klein**

Sure. Yeah, yeah. When Sarah Palin was going to announce that she wasn't going to run for president in the last cycle, we had a heads up of seconds that it was going to happen, literally seconds. She was going to announce it in a radio interview and we knew seconds before it was going to happen. And that was like ...

## Michael O'Connell

Get those thumbs moving.

## Rick Klein

Yeah, shaking as I'm typing to try to type it as fast as I could because in that nanosecond ... . Now, those are not the kind of scoops that careers are made on like, I'm not suggesting that we're breaking Watergate on Twitter by saying that Sarah Palin's not going to run 10 seconds before the rest of the universe. But, there is an opportunity there, and I think a realization from organizations like ABC that the idea of holding this news till 6:30 doesn't work anymore. There's somethings you can do, like truly exciting, big investigative exclusives, things like that, but like the basic news cycle will not wait for the next broadcast or the next morning's paper. We have to be out there and in the news cycle constantly to keep that in the mix, constantly.

## Michael O'Connell

Give us a little insight then on the process of something that breaks on Twitter. What does that do in the newsroom that you're at?

## Rick Klein

Well, the first thing would be that people would start forwarding it around. If it's something in my world, did we know this? Can we match this? Do we think this is true? Those kind of question get asked really quickly. Sometimes, to use a current events example of the plane crash in San Francisco, a lot of what was coming out on Twitter, a lot is wrong, as always. A lot of it though is photos and videos and things that we needed to get our lawyers on to clear and to ask people for the rights to broadcast various images that were coming out. But just as an early warning system to get us asking the questions in the right direction to know who we're calling or where we're going to be asking to find out more about something.

There's a lot of truly awful things that people put out there that ends up being, maliciously or not, just wrong. We have to be very careful in terms of what we do as a news organization. We've got pretty strict guidelines about when we're allowed to report something on Twitter or anywhere else. We'll get in trouble with the higher ups if we jump the gun on those sort of things and they're important. Whether that's someone dying, you know, if everyone's tweeting memories of that person and we want to make sure they're actually dead before we do that because there's a lot of rumors out there. You don't want to fondly remember someone too often. So, there's a piece around that. And, again, just as an early warning sign, we knew about the San Francisco thing before most of the public did because we had people monitoring. We have a social media desk at ABC News that is spending basically 24/7 monitoring tweets and seeing what's out there and seeing what the next big story's going to be.

I liken it to when I was a cops reporter at The Dallas Morning News. I used to make a round of cops calls. I had 75 local police agencies that I would call twice a day. "Anything going on? Thanks. Anything going? How are things in Coppell this morning?"

How are things in Farmers Branch? Anything going on?" And I would just call one by one by one and just to get a sense of what's happening. Maybe that's still happening at places. I kind of doubt it. I feel like you could follow enough Twitter feeds that you'd know something big is happening in any of those places without having to make the phone calls. So, just as a scanner traffic of 2013.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Somebody who sees you on TV as a political expert, a political analyst, a broadcaster, who wants to figure out what the track is to get to that job. What would you recommend?

### **Rick Klein**

I think go deep in the world that you want to cover. Find a way to be covering politics at a state or a local level, maybe at the national level, if you want to go deep to work for The Hill or Roll Call or Politico or something. But, learn a particular subject area and use that as your launching point.

I was fortunate, I worked for The Dallas Morning News, I didn't do much politics in Dallas, but I happened to be there when George W. Bush became a national figure and ran for president. And then I was in Boston covering John Kerry in around 2004 and Mitt Romney, you know, emanated from the state as well. So, I knew, there was a little bit of specialty knowledge that I could bring to a national story pretty early on in my career. And I think the political journalists that I've know have been there for hot stories. They happen to be the reporter at the state house in Little Rock when Bill Clinton became a national figure.

There's something to be said for just learning something, having an area of specialty and using that to kind of develop your Rolodex, develop your contacts, develop your sources and to expand beyond that, but using something strong as a home base than to come in and say, "I'm going to be covering the 2016 election." It's really hard. There's a lot of candidates and there's a lot of potential news to be broken, but there's a lot of potential roadblocks in that. I wouldn't recommend that any, unless you're like, there are true dynamos in this world that can do it at 22. I wasn't one of them. I feel like you still need some years in the political minors to get ready for the big league pitching.

### **Megan Cloherty**

And the reporting minors.

### **Rick Klein**

Yes, yes. Like covering cops in Dallas, it was never going to be my longterm career goal, but it teaches you to learn any story quickly, be very detail oriented and being able to ask uncomfortable questions of people in authority, like cops and prosecutors. And also, grieving families, to knock on a door. I still think that's the hardest thing I've ever done in journalism is to have to knock on the door of someone whose loved one died

and ask for a photo on the way out the door. After that, it's easy ask a politician why they flip-flopped on something.

## **Michael O'Connell**

And those are important skills to learn and important stories to do as well.

We kind of touched a little bit on the presidential election thing and just looking at the 2012 and sort of the role that social media played on that. How important a roll is that going to play in upcoming elections? Do you think we're going to see less of an impact of mainstream media and newspapers and is it going to be more of that? Or do you think that what had happened with the Obama campaign was sort of overblown and that's not going to be so much of a factor?

## **Rick Klein**

I think it's going to be a factor in the same way that I talked about myself as platform agnostic, I think campaigns are too. They want to reach people as they want to be reached, as they're reachable and it doesn't matter what that is. It used to be direct mail and phone calls and TV were the only ways to do it. And now there are other ways.

Now I'll also tell you, talking first hand talking to campaigns, by far the most effective way of disseminating a message remains television advertising. It is just the one kind of foolproof way that you can get in the mix. They would love it, because it's expensive, they would love to find another way to do it. They'd love to spend less money and get people on Twitter instead. Doesn't work the same way.

There's some data out there that suggests that the person-to-person contacts can be more valuable on balance, but they're harder to make. I don't think we're ready for the full social media alone election, far from it. The vast majority of money spent in 2012 was still on big television ads. It will be in 2016. It will be in 2020. There will be a time, maybe in my career, maybe not, where that's not the main way to reach people, but it is for the foreseeable future. There will be more of a role, people will be playing around with some things in social media, but I also think that no one's going to take the plunge and be done with traditional media because that's still the way to reach large numbers of people.

## **Megan Cloherty**

As far as political reporting goes, do you feel like we're going in the right direction? Or do you feel like you're kind of things are stalling out? Are you optimistic?

## **Rick Klein**

I define the right direction in maybe a different way than a lot of people do. I define the right direction in terms of promoting participation, because I think that fundamentally what we do as political reporters, what I do as a political reporter, is to inform the public about their elected officials and about the candidates for office. And people need to take that information and then exercise their own judgment and they vote and they exercise



their rights in a democracy. I feel strongly about voting. I vote every time. I don't tell anyone, even my mom, who I'm voting for, but I vote every time I can because I feel like personally I wouldn't be true to my own mission if I didn't vote at the end of the day, because I feel like that's promoting it.

You look at polls and people hate politicians and they hate political journalists and all that.

### **Michael O'Connell**

They hate all journalists.

### **Rick Klein**

They hate all journalists, yeah, so, in any of those metrics, you shouldn't be particularly optimistic about the direction of political journalism if you hate politics and politicians and you hate journalists and everything like that. But, we are seeing participation after a long downward trend begin to pick up. The 2008 campaign even more than 2012, but it's held relatively steady. So, to the extent that people are caring about this stuff and they're passionate about it even if they may hate something in particular that you write or report, that leaves me relatively optimistic.

The other thing I'm optimistic about, I should say for this audience, is the prospects for journalists and political journalists included. There are just so many opportunities out there that weren't out there 15 years ago when I got in the business or certainly weren't there 25 or 35 years ago. People that are able to make their own stand and their own mark on things very quickly and don't have to spend as much time toiling away. You have less of a risk of getting lost in a place that you're not happy as a reporter. For people that have the drive, the ambition, the smarts, the technological know-how, there's a lot of paths out there that you get to chart for yourself.

### **Megan Cloherty**

Well this has been very interesting and great. Tell us where people can find your work on social media.

### **Rick Klein**

Well, [@rickklein](https://twitter.com/rickklein), pretty easy to find on Twitter. Facebook, search me, Rick Klein at ABC. [ABCNews.go.com/politics](http://ABCNews.go.com/politics) is the clearing house of all of the digital content that we have and we try to feed as much of it as possible through The Note and The Note Blog, though Web stories, through the video we put up there with our partnership with Yahoo! and my show Top Line, so we try to be as full service as possible.

### **Megan Cloherty**

There's a lot there.

### **Rick Klein**

Start with Twitter, because that's usually the one place to get everything.

**Michael O'Connell**

Content is king.

**Rick Klein**

Indeed.

**Michael O'Connell**

Well, thank you very much for coming in Rick. This has been great.

**Rick Klein**

Thank you.