



## JEAN-CLAUDE GRUFFAT

Member of United Way Leadership Council, board member of Atlas Network, Managing Director of Weild and Co LLC New York

**Virginie Robert, Foreign Desk Editor at *Les Échos*, Vice President of the European-American Press Club in Paris**

Turning to you, Jean-Claude, maybe we can have the highlights of what is happening in the United States and where the debate is going right now.

**Jean-Claude Gruffat, member of United Way Leadership Council, Board member Atlas Network, Managing Director of Weild and Co LLC New York**

I wish I could be with you but unfortunately I had a health issue just I was about to board the flight and I miss being in the room and able to network with you. I will try to cover in a few minutes what I guess you are expecting me to talk about, which is the US presidential election and more generally, the election in November 2024, from both the domestic standpoint and that of the geopolitical environment.

You know what is happening in November 2024, which is almost exactly a year from today. The President will be elected for four years, the House of Representatives will be elected for two years and 33 Senators, about one-third, will be elected for a period of six years. When it comes to the Senate and the House of Representatives, 20 Democrats and three independents who normally caucus with the Democrats are standing for re-election, some of them are not standing for re-election but those are the seats, then there are 10 Republicans to give a total of 33. The forecast at the moment is that 14 are solid Democrat with one leading Democrat, and five are leading likely Democrat and there are three so-called toss ups where the results will depend on election day. The Republicans are almost all likely to be re-elected. There could be a change of majority in the Senate but right now, as you know, there is a majority of Democratic Senators, 51 to 49 and there is the casting vote of the Vice President so the Senate majority could change and it will largely depend on what I call the coat-tail effect of the presidential election. The House of Representatives, 435 members, 221 Republicans and 212 Democrats since the last mid-term elections in November exactly a year ago, and two seats are vacant. My prediction is that after the zoo we have seen for the election of the Speaker it is very unlikely that the Republicans will be able to keep a majority in the House and it could become Democratic again by a slight majority.

We are now in the period where, as you know, there may be several potential candidates but at the end of the day there are two parties in the United States, Democrat and Republican, and they are now choosing their own candidate for next year's election. The tradition for both Republicans and Democrats is that a President, whom we call the incumbent, is likely to stand without being challenged. However, Joe Biden is facing some opposition for a variety of reasons within his own party, first of which is his age. If he is elected in November next year he will assume his functions at the beginning of 2025 and he will be 82 years old and he will be 86 by the time he finishes his mandate, and he will be the oldest President in the history of the United States. He is also facing other issues like his Vice President, Kamala Harris, who has never been convincing and is not liked or respected by her own party, the Democratic

party. She has never been able to impress and as you know, if something happens to the President, Kamala Harris immediately steps in and becomes the next President. Americans, starting with a majority of Democrats, are very uncomfortable with that. Then he has issues with his son and the business activities of his family. It is quite simple, people know that unless something happens to him between now and the election, he will be the candidate for the Democratic party but he is not the candidate that the Democratic party would like to have. Biden was elected in 2020 largely because he was the alternative to Bernie Sanders, who people found too left-wing and did not really campaign and he was lucky to face Trump who had a lot of issues. He was elected but this time it is going to be much tougher and people are not convinced that Biden is the best candidate to face Trump, assuming Trump is the nominee of the Republican party.

Switching to the Republican party, it is the same story, Trump is leading in the polls but effectively with only 40% of the people who can vote at the primaries. I remind you that only registered Republicans or Democrats can vote, so you can vote at the Democratic primary if you are a registered Democrat and at the Republican primary if you are a registered Republican. However, the majority of Americans are neither Republicans or Democrats and are registered as independents. Trump only gets around 40% of Republican voters, while 60% do not want Trump but the problem is that they do not agree on an alternative to Trump, so like Biden, Trump is not the candidate of the party as it stands now for at least the majority of Republican voters. First, that is because of his personality, some people do not like his personality, style, attitudes, etc. Then he has a lot of legal and personal issues, sexual assaults, etc., but he also took some classified documents when he left office and took them to Florida and lied about it. Then he rejected the results of the election, and there was this famous event on 6 January 2021 when there was an assault on The Capitol that shocked a lot of people around the world but here too. I could go on and on and Trump is essentially perceived as an egoistic individual. When he was President he did follow some of his better advisors and did a number of things but net-net, people do not feel that Trump, who is also only maybe a couple of years younger than Biden, the person that Americans would like to have as the next President.

### **Virginie Robert**

What might be the outcome?

### **Jean-Claude Gruffat**

My view is that it is going to be Trump/Biden. As I said, Biden could have health and other issues between now and the election and be replaced by a governor. While Trump is facing challenges and although he leads in the polls, he leads in Ohio, New Hampshire, as well as South Carolina and there are two alternatives waiting in the wings. There is the Governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, who won during the 2020 election, which was very significant but he has taken a number of missteps since he was reelected and his campaign is not going well. He was relatively strong and could have beaten Trump, but now I see him gradually fading away. The star who is rising is Nikki Haley, former Governor of South Carolina, who was also Ambassador to the United Nations. Her family are Sikhs originally from India who came to the United States. She served locally for one and a half terms as Governor of South Carolina and was appointed as Ambassador to the UN by Trump, where she did an effective job. She is part of what I call the Reaganian part of the party, traditional Republicans who are strong on foreign policy, free markets and limited government, so she is a traditional Republican. She was loyal to Trump when she was doing the United Nations job, at the same time, she was able to take less rigid and less conservative positions than some other Republicans, particularly on the critical topics in the United States with women's rights including the right to abortion. As you know, the majority of American people are in favor of abortion, not all



abortions or for extended period of time. It so happens that the majority of the Republican party is so-called pro-life and this is conflicting with the view of the majority.

**Virginie Robert**

That was a first round and you have already taken quite long, so we are going to come back with more questions if you do not mind sticking around with us for a bit longer so that everyone has time. Now we have the basics, Biden on one side, Trump the other, Nikki Haley is coming up and some of you have hopes for her but we are not sure. There are a lot of things to talk about, especially how geopolitics are getting into this election, which never happens and I know you are keen to talk about it a bit later.