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Conversation No. 33-47

Date: November 7, 1972

Time: 8:06 pm - 8:20 pm

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard M. Nixon; Charles W. Colson.

In an election night conversation between President Nixon and Counsel to the President Chuck Colson, Colson provides the early election returns now that the east coast polls have begun to close, noting that “it looks to me like a very big landslide”, after NBC called the election for the president at 7:05 pm.

After a tour of the available state results, Nixon and Colson concede that much to their disappointment, the Republican Party will not likely take control of the House or the Senate. However, softening the blow, Colson consoles, “I haven’t seen anyone predict us winning the Senate or the House.”

Nixon: Hello?

Colson: Well, congratulations, Mr. President.

Nixon: Well, what’s it look like at the 8 o’clock reading?

Colson: It looks to me like a very big landslide. Just about. I think we’re going to make honest men out of the pollsters.

Nixon: What is it? Give me a quick rundown—

Colson: Well, Virginia’s—They’ve projected Virginia at 70 percent. They’ve projected Kentucky with almost all the votes in now at 65 percent.

Nixon: What about Nunn? Is he out, or...?

Colson: Nunn is down by about 8,000 votes with 77 percent of the votes in.

Nixon: He could still win it couldn’t he?

Colson: Yeah, it’s—We don’t know where the votes, where the precincts are that are not being counted, if they’re coming from Republican areas.

Nixon: I understand—I’ve heard that—David’s been reporting to me. He said that apparently Thompson didn’t make it. Huh?

Colson: Thompson looks like he’s down. On the other hand—

Nixon: How’d we do in Georgia?

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Colson: Oh, Jesus! [*chuckles*] Well, the last figure—Let's see: 77 percent. You're just overwhelming in the South. Obviously. I mean it's very, very heavy about what we expected; about what we expected in the border states. They're projecting Ohio at 57-58 percent. They've already called it for us. We've been called—They've called West Virginia for us. NBC's projection there is 58 percent. After 58 percent in West Virginia you're going to be 60 [*percent*] in the nation. NBC, privately I have Kevin Phillips, who's been—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —filling me in. Oh here's now—Now, Nunn is down 25,000 down with 85—with 87 percent of the precincts in.

Nixon: It looks like the Senate's gone. Doesn't it?

Colson: Yeah, it does.

Nixon: Well, we did our best. Thank God we went in there.

Colson: We may have this fellow Scott in.

Nixon: He has a slight lead?

Colson: Yeah. He's got a slight lead with a small number of precincts in, but he's been coming on. I've been getting reports from Jack Marsh and others over the last week that he was going to win—

Nixon: And there are good reports on Helms that he may take it, huh?

Colson: No real—Well, just a smattering of votes in so far.

Nixon: Right.

Colson: But he—Yeah, reports have been very good. He's ahead on the few votes that are in, but that's just nothing. I mean, just a couple of percent? But I—

Nixon: Anything on Illinois yet?

Colson: Well, they've called—NBC has called it for you, but all they have are some, uh...

Nixon: Chicago precincts?

Colson: ...Chicago precincts in, and not enough to—

Nixon: Yeah.

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Colson: —tell you what the state is gonna be. They've called us winning it. In fact, NBC has called us winning it. The call at 7:05, not only called the election for us, but called it a landslide. And Phillips says that they are internally, at NBC, on the Scammon precinct analysis they are calling it. They think it's going to be right around 60. It could go over 60 [percent]—

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Colson: Nationally. Now they don't have enough yet from the Northeast to...

Nixon: Right. Or the West.

Colson: Or the West, but you've got, as I said—

Nixon: But the South's very heavy, so that's it.

Colson: The South is very heavy. Now there's West Virginia. ABC's projecting it at 60 percent, but Phillips says 58. Ohio they've called at 57 although we're running 2-to-1 there. On the national vote it's running 67-32 percent with, oh, 4 million...

Nixon: Yeah?

Colson: ...almost 4 million votes in. But it's running very consistently 67-32. That's mostly...

Nixon: That's mostly the South.

Colson: Well, you've got Indiana in there.

Nixon: What's it show?

Colson: Let me see. Indiana we did handsomely.

Nixon: I knew it'd be good. It has to be good.

Colson: They're projecting [a] 64 to 65 percent win, and you've carried the governor in on your coattails, who was not expected to win. If you remember, he's running against—what's his name?—the former governor, [Matthew] Welsh.

Nixon: Right—

Colson: Matt Welsh, who's a very popular—who was a very popular Democratic governor. So, you've carried the governor in in Indiana, and 7 percent of the precincts in—it looks like you're carrying—

Nixon: It'll be interesting to see how Illinois comes out. It'd be nice if we could do a little better than Percy there.

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Colson: Oh, boy, would I love to. In the first, very early returns—I only saw—As a matter of fact they came out so damn fast I didn't get them down [*but*] Percy was running just a little bit ahead of us. I don't think—I think we're going to run better than Percy. The Democrats for Nixon ran a fabulous ad out there yesterday, which said "Democrats before you engage your ballot,"—"before you," uh...

Nixon: How did they say it?

Colson: I've forgotten how they said it. What was it? "First pull the lever for President Nixon before voting for Democratic candidates." And then my reports from [*Vito*] Marzullo's ward and others were that we were doing extremely—

Nixon: All right.

Colson: —extremely well in some of the Cook County precincts. So, we may just surprise Percy.

Nixon: Well, it doesn't make any difference, just so we do it.

Colson: Well, you've got a—What is obvious now, at this...

Nixon: What about any Northeastern state? Maine? Vermont? Any of those?

Colson: Oh, Vermont they've called it with 70 percent which is just what our polls showed. New Hampshire they've called, and...

Nixon: What about [*Wesley*] Powell?

Colson: Running slightly behind on the first returns that I saw, but only Concord, New Hampshire, was in.

Nixon: That's bad for him.

Colson: Um, yes it is—

Nixon: No, no. Concord's a bad area for him—

Colson: That's right. Concord's a liberal area and that shows the independent Republican winning the governorship if you project it. It's too early to tell in New Hampshire. We will have—We should start getting Connecticut. We'll get Connecticut at 8:30. Connecticut will tell us what the Northeast is, and I think you can—once we have—

Nixon: You figure Connecticut 55-45 or a little better?

Colson: We'll do better than that.

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Nixon: Now I notice one of the networks said 55-45, somebody told me, but I thought, good God we'll do a little better than that in Connecticut.

Colson: Now we'll do better than that in Connecticut. We'll do, I would say, very close to—We should do close to 60 in Connecticut. We should be 58 to 60 [*percent*], and if we are then I think you can pretty well figure—and if Illinois holds around 60-40, or 58; Ohio at 57—then you've got 60 percent nationally. We'll make honest men out of the pollsters. [*laughs*]

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: One hell of a landslide, Mr. President.

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: I give 'em...

Nixon: How about Massachusetts? Got that yet?

Colson: No, the polls just closed there at 8 and the only returns we'll have will be city machines. There aren't many machines up against us.

Nixon: Of course.

Colson: Yeah, but we can pretty well project from those. I think I'll—I'll be able to get us a fairly accurate—

Nixon: Well, I must say if we've got to lose one let's lose that one.

Colson: Yeah. I—I—That's the best one to go.

Nixon: Nothing from Wisconsin yet?

Colson: I hear they've got Illinois—No. Nothing from Wisconsin. They're projecting Illinois but only on the basis of 20,000 votes in. That isn't—That isn't enough to give us a margin.

Nixon: Well, that is—Jesus!

Colson: CBS's estimate is 62 percent for us in Illinois. And, uh...

Nixon: Well, then you've got Wisconsin.

Colson: Oh, hell yes!

Nixon: If you're anywhere near 60 percent—

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Colson: Oh, yeah. They're projecting Percy at 60 percent. By God, isn't that great? I thought—I've had two sneaking hunches in this campaign. One is that we were going to pull this jackass Scott in in Virginia and the other is that we'd run ahead of Percy.

Nixon: But if we could get Scott and Helms—

Colson: But Scott—

Nixon: —and not lose Nunn—goddamn—in Kentucky. I don't know. You think he's gone, though?

Colson: I would say. I would have to say so. Yes, sir.

Nixon: Well—

Colson: That's a damn shame because that's one—I hear they're projecting North Carolina. No, they're not projecting it. Galifianakis is ahead slightly, but they're not—there's no projection in it. You can't. It's awful—

Nixon: How does it show us in North Carolina?

Colson: Oh, they've already given it to us.

Nixon: But that without, but what percent[age]?

Colson: Percentage wise I think it was at 60. Let's see. I've made a note of that one. 60s. High 60s.

Nixon: Right.

Colson: Florida they projected us at 69; Georgia at 77.

Nixon: What was the trouble with Thompson? I guess that mail thing sort of killed him, huh?

Colson: Well, I think the mail thing was very bad for him. Mr. President, I think he's not the brightest guy in the world, and of course a lot of those candidates aren't, unfortunately, but also he—

Nixon: Well, we're not going to worry about the Senate. We're going to pick up New Mexico, I think we'll pick up Bartlett. We'll get two out there.

Colson: If you get two out there, you got, if we hold—

Nixon: Of course, we lose Nunn, that's the problem.

Colson: [*John H.*] Chafee I don't think we're gonna be able to hold him.

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Nixon: You don't really?

Colson: No, sir.

Nixon: Why? Have you had a late poll?

Colson: No. The last poll I had was the middle of last week but just knowing the nature of that state and the advantage that, uh...

Nixon: We'll be lucky to hold the Senate where we are then, huh?

Colson: I would—Well—

Nixon: No, no, no, no. That ought to gain.

Colson: —we could pick up a couple. We may have some surprises in here, you know. It's hard—it's hard to, uh...

Nixon: We're picking up some House seats here and there I noticed.

Colson: I would—

Nixon: One in Indiana. One in—

Colson: Yeah.

Nixon: —Tennessee.

Colson: Yeah. I think we got one in Kentucky. I believe it's—I believe we had one in Kentucky. Oh, I think we'll pick up in the South. We should pick up 8 or 10 in the—10 or 12 in the So[uth]. Well, no, running this strong, God, we'll do better than that. You'll pick up quite a few in Alabama—should.

Nixon: Some in—You might pick up a couple in Florida.

Colson: Yeah, two or three. Oh, yes, there're five new seats—

Nixon: One or two in Mississippi?

Colson: I would say at least two in Mississippi. We'll pick up one in Louisiana I think that fellow [David C.] Treen may...

Nixon: Yeah.

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Colson: ...may pull it through. So, we could pick up a good batch in the South. And, I think, we have, of course we'll get four in Connecticut if that goes as big as—

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Colson: —Tommy Meskill thinks it will. And—

Nixon: Unfortunately, the candidates we've campaigned for aren't doing very well. Are they?

Colson: Well, you don't...

Nixon: If Chafee loses; if, of course, Thompson is down; Helms's still got a chance.

Colson: Oh, yes. Helms there's only 2 percent of the precincts in in North Carolina. I wouldn't try to call Helms at this point.

Nixon: You never can tell about Kentucky. It is a—The way I remember it with Thurston Morton on occasion—

Colson: Oh—

Nixon: —runs way behind—

Colson: —Jesus!—

Nixon: —and then everything comes in in the end.

Colson: Yeah, I remember—

Nixon: You see, those Eastern counties are all ours.

Colson: Yeah, and they come in the last. That's right. That's right. We might—That could be pulled through. That'd be the only—Oh, let's see Griffin and our fellow in South Dakota.

Nixon: [*Unclear*] I think Griffin will win.

Colson: Oh, Griffin will win. Oh, hell yes.

Nixon: But—But, uh, South Dakota? Well, it's a long shot.

Colson: We could, could, could lose that. That would be down two and up four so we'd have—if Bartlett and Dominici come in, and Scott wins...

Nixon: But if you get Dominici and if you get, uh—Well, you've gotta win Scott, you've gotta win Dominici, and you've gotta win Bartlett that's three. And you're down South Dakota and that's it.

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Colson: Oh, and Kentucky.

Nixon: Kentucky, too. Well, that's one up.

Colson: One up, and maybe if we then pull in Helms that gives us two up.

Nixon: Helms or Chafee.

Colson: Or Chafee. Yeah. Oh, hell, I'm just guessing on Chafee. I don't know. Chafee could win.

Nixon: Fine.

Colson: And [*Herbert F.*] DeSimone I'm sure will win. That gives us a pull.

Nixon: Right.

Colson: We've elected the Republican candidate for governor in Vermont [*Luther F. Haskett*] who was hanging on your coattails like crazy. We picked up a House seat in Maine, apparently.

Nixon: Is Maine in? Do we have that projected yet?

Colson: No, sir. But they told me when I talked to them up there today in Bangor that this young Bangor mayor, [*William S.*] Cohen, bright young—bright young Jewish fellow...

Nixon: Our man?

Colson: Our man. Yeah.

Nixon: He'll win?

Colson: Yeah. Apparently he's doing—

Nixon: Good.

Colson: They were projecting him—I mean they were predicting up there that he'd win it quite handily. And Margaret [*Chase Smith*] they thought would just squeak it out. They think that she's going to barely make it. The poll that you saw was of only certain counties in—

Nixon: Right.

Colson: —the Eastern part of the state. And they think she'll—

Nixon: Ok.

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Colson: —she'll make it by a close one, but, uh...

Nixon: Well, uh, we'll wait 'til we get Connecticut. I think in Connecticut 80,000 and that's damn good.

Colson: Well—

Nixon: And 80,000, you know, is a landslide and that'll pick us up two or three there. Won't it?

Colson: Um, it'll pick us up two. 80,000 will.

Nixon: Is that all?

Colson: I think so, but we're going to do better than that. I think you're safe in Connecticut. I don't know, Tommy Meskill is an awful good politician. I—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —I'd give him, I'd give us one or two—

Nixon: Another place where we pick some up [*is*] in New Jersey if we get enough a swing—

Colson: Yeah. Exactly. There are three—as a matter of fact there are three seats there that could go up...

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Colson: We could pick up one or two close ones in Pennsylvania as I recall again. We've got some, a couple of possibilities in New Jersey—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —so we may do very well in the House. Well, we'll just—

Nixon: We'll see.

Colson: But it's certainly, from your standpoint—

Nixon: What is your feeling that if we don't win the House and the Senate? I suppose that's the way that they'll piss on the damn thing. Well?

Colson: I don't think so. It's all been discounted. I mean I haven't seen anyone predict us winning the Senate or the House—

Nixon: Right.

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Colson: —and I said we had to fight for the Senate and maybe you could do it. But the House had no chance at all...

Nixon: That's right.

Colson: ...so no one's really predicted that. Also, we've had—

Nixon: We've got Jerry Ford's little deal that might help, you think?

Colson: Oh, hell yes if we get, uh...

Nixon: If he gets those ten swingers.

Colson: Yeah. If we get within twelve then he's got something he can work with. We might bring the House over. I think they've discounted it also in a sense, Mr. President...

Nixon: Right.

Colson: ...that they've talked about nothing but ticket splitting. You know that's been the—

Nixon: Right. Right.

Colson: —the big thing, and, uh...

Nixon: Well, anyway, we'll wait and see.

Colson: It looks like a great night coming.

Nixon: Fine. Bye—

Colson: Thank you, sir.