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Conversation No. 33-108

Date: November 19, 1972

Time: 9:35 am – 10:46 am

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard M. Nixon; Charles W. Colson

In an excerpt of an extended conversation with Counsel to the President Chuck Colson, Nixon and Colson discuss, among other topics, the second term government reorganization and the state of the Republican Party following what Nixon perceived to be its poor performance during the 1972 Congressional elections.

Nixon concludes, “whether or not the Republican Party can be rebuilt, Chuck, is...very questionable...your leadership in the states is so bad”, including California, Michigan, Ohio, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois.

Colson agrees, noting that there is new a trend in electoral behavior, adding “that there isn’t any more real party loyalty...in the country. People vote for one man for the presidency, and then they’ll turn right around and deliberately vote the other party to keep a balance, because they don’t want too much government.”

[Approximately 55 minutes of conversation omitted]

Nixon: Because you know, whether or not the Republican Party can be rebuilt, Chuck, is a, very, very questionable. I mean, we’ll do our best. But, I mean, not because it couldn’t be done, but because, basically, your leadership in the states is so bad.

Colson: Um-hmm.

Nixon: I mean, frankly, in California, it’s Reagan, and you can’t do it around him. He’s got to do it.

Colson: That’s right.

Nixon: And Reagan is a drag. Understand?

Colson: Well, and—

Nixon: And Michigan, you aren’t going to rebuild the Republican Party in Michigan, as long as you’ve got that fellow as governor.

Colson: No.

Nixon: Massachusetts, no way.

Colson: No.

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Nixon: [Thomas J.] Meskill, yes, you could do something there. You might do something in New Jersey.

Colson: Yeah.

Nixon: [Nelson A.] Rockefeller? Maybe in New York, if he can keep the conservatives in line.

Colson: Yep.

Nixon: Illinois? There is no Republican Party in Illinois today.

Colson: Hmm.

Nixon: You know that.

Colson: Hmm.

Nixon: Ohio? Shattered, because of the [William] Saxbe fight with [Robert] Taft. It still gets down to states, doesn't it?

Colson: It gets down to that, Mr. President, and it also gets down to the [John] Connally theory, which I totally agree with, that there isn't any more real party loyalty—

Nixon: That's right.

Colson: —in the country. People vote for one man for the presidency, and then they'll turn right around and deliberately vote the other party to keep a balance, because they don't want too much government. What they're really saying is, we want to kind of keep that government semi-paralyzed—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: We're afraid of giving of ever giving too much power—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —again like [Lyndon] Johnson had and they'll go crazy.

Nixon: Let me say, incidentally, though than on, speaking on power and the rest, I think the best thing we're doing is getting this Goddamn government reorganized.

Colson: Oh, so do I.

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Nixon: Because if we hadn't done it now, the way these cabinet people are, good God, you know what they want, they just want to sit on their ass on the same bureaucracy and continue doing what they're doing. And they all think that "we would have won anyway."

Colson: That's right. No, that—

Nixon: Do you agree?

Colson: Absolutely.

Nixon: And I think the shake up their getting, and the shake up this bureaucracy is getting, we're getting—I talked to [Press Secretary Ron] Ziegler. He said, sure we're getting some flak in the Washington papers, but he says around the country, it's been almost universally favorable.

Colson: People love it.

Nixon: What do you find?

Colson: The same thing. That people think it's a damn healthy thing. Now, the only place you begin to get any questions are from Republicans, who begin to get worried well, maybe, maybe we're, you know—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —shaking all our of own, throwing out all the [*unclear*]—

Nixon: That's why you can keep Morton. Well, we're not—Which ones are we throwing out?

Colson: No, I'm—

Nixon: That's right.

Colson: —I'm just saying they're beginning—

Nixon: That's right.

Colson: —you just get the [*unclear*] question about "Well, what about this, what about that". I think keeping Morton—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —that's one I would argue for him—

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Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —for doing that. He's doesn't really realize he can't run anything—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —but he's one that has party symbolism. If you ever brought Armstrong in, my God, you'd—

Nixon: You'd make it. Yeah.

Colson: —you'd make it.

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: The only area, Mr. President, and I'll—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —I'll lay this out for you tomorrow night, that gives me any cause for concern at all, is that I know the battles we've had in the White House. We haven't had the media with us, we haven't had the Congress with us.

Nixon: That's right.

Colson: You have needed around you some tools to mobilize the public, and to get to leaders around—

Nixon: Right.

Colson: —right over the heads of the media in the country—

Nixon: Right.

Colson: —on a one on one basis. You've had to do some of that. And I just don't want to see you lose that—

Nixon: Yeah.

Colson: —capability.

Nixon: We not only have to have it there, Chuck, but we've got to have it outside, too. I think we can do both. I think we can do both. But we cannot keep the huge apparatus we've had previously.

Colson: No, we don't need that.

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Nixon: But, uh—

Colson: You need a small—

Nixon: I think, for example, if we have on the outside, if we have your operation—

Colson: Right

Nixon: —on the outside, with, you know, with the levers of power where they know, plus the inside, but you need the inside capability, too.

Colson: We need it—

Nixon: You see, otherwise were going to have a situation where everybody around, Klein and all the rest, are going to want to stay, and that we don't need them, we don't want them.

Colson: No.

Nixon: The purpose of this—See, the way Klein sees this is we've got to inform the editors, and keep an open administration. That's all a bunch of crap.

Colson: No, no, bullshit. You want to use them occasionally. *[laughs]*

Nixon: That's right.

[Approximately 12 minutes of conversation omitted]