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Conversation No. 33-88

Date: November 18, 1972

Time: 12:02 pm - 12:08 pm

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard M. Nixon; Leonard Garment

In an excerpt of a telephone conversation between President Nixon and Counsel to the President Leonard Garment, Nixon reminisces that just ten years earlier he was making his concession statement to Pat Brown in his failed bid in the California gubernatorial election.

Expanding on the topic of concession statements, Nixon says, “incidentally, what in the hell is the matter with McGovern?” The president compares his concession statements from 1960 and 1962, and Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater’s from 1964 to George McGovern’s of 1972, noting that McGovern should not have said “‘the country lost’, for Christ’s sakes. You can’t say that, I mean, even if you believed it.”

Garment responds, “well, you’re just such an impermeable part of the history of this century.”

[Approximately 1 minutes and 40 seconds of unrelated conversation omitted]

Nixon: [...] I’m getting through all the cabinet now, *[laughs]* you know.

Garment: Ok.

Nixon: Which is a hairy experience.

Garment: I imagine so.

Nixon: What, actually, we’re, we’re uh, what we really doing is shuffling more than—

Garment: Right.

Nixon: —which is the right thing. I’m putting a new man at virtually every job. I think you’ll agree—

Garment: Yes.

Nixon: —you know, the major problem with everything, Len, people become prisoners of the bureaucracy.

Garment: Um-hmm.

Nixon: And then, and, uh, I am going over with [Office of Management and Budget Deputy Director] Cap [Weinberger], when I found this case. Incidentally, that, I think you’d be pleased to know, I’m giving Cap a major cabinet appointment.

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Garment: That's great. That's terrific!

Nixon: And I think he deserves it. Don't you?

Garment: Oh, he's—

Nixon: I'll tell you, in greatest of confidence, what it is. I'm going to give him H.E.W. And I'm going to move, uh, [Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare] Elliot [Richardson], however, to another very high position.

Garment: Um-hmm.

Nixon: Because Elliot, I think, is first class, don't you?

Garment: Well they're both men of, uh, great intelligence and courage

[Approximately 7 seconds of unrelated conversation omitted]

Nixon: What did you think about the election incidentally? Did it bother you?

Garment: *[laughs]* Well, I thought it was a pretty good election. *[laughs]*

Nixon: Huh?

Garment: It was, it was—

Nixon: Well, I think it's come a long way since that time, isn't it? Yeah.

Garment: Well, you very, uh, I was talking about—

Nixon: When you stop to think that 10 years ago, I just wrote a letter to [California Governor-elect] Pat Brown, you know—

Garment: Yeah.

Nixon: And, uh, Pat Brown, said, uh, he's was thinking back to 10 years ago, when I had to make my concession statement, which incidentally, if you go back and read, it looks pretty good, because I was very kind to Carl Greenberg and the good guys—

Garment: Right.

Nixon: —but I kicked the hell out of the bad guys.

Garment: Right.

Nixon: But I was gracious to Brown, that's the important thing.

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Garment: Yeah.

Nixon: Incidentally, what in the hell is the matter with McGovern?

Garment: Well—

Nixon: That statement of his I thought was—

Garment: He's a crazy—

Nixon: Uh—

Garment: No sense of history, any of these fellas'.

Nixon: But, you know, when you think of [Arizona Senator Barry] Goldwater, how gracious he was after '64, how gracious I was when I lost in '60.

Garment: And when you came in, one of the best moments in the past quarter century, uh, announcing the election of, uh, [John F.] Kennedy to the Joint—

Nixon: Yeah, remember when I went to the Joint Session?

Garment: Yeah, very moving.

Nixon: Well, I don't mean, I'm not bragging that, but Goldwater was very good, too, you know.

Garment: Yeah.

Nixon: He didn't say "the country lost", for Christ's sakes. You can't say that, I mean, even if you believed it.

Garment: Yeah. Well, you're just such an impermeable part of the history of this century, of the last 25 or 30 years, and the last quarter century, that, uh, there, uh, it's a unique sensation to be able to—

Nixon: Yeah.

Garment: —talk to you in these terms, but that's the—

Nixon: Ok, well, get to work on the bicentennial.

Garment: Oh, I'm working on it.

Nixon: Ok, I'll see you.

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Garment: I'll see you on Monday.

Nixon: Bye.

Garment: Thanks very much for calling.