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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
DEAN BURCH
COUNSELLOR TO THE PRESIDENT

THE BRIEFING ROOM

11:13 P.M. EST

MR. NESSEN: We promised you there would be statements by Presidential Counsellors. The first of those is Dean Burch, Counsellor on Political Affairs.

MR. BURCH: I have no statement.

Q What do you think of the elections so far, especially in terms of the Republicans?

MR. BURCH: Obviously when you only have 187 seats in the House you don't want to lose even one seat. We didn't want to lose any seats. We wanted to win seats. So I can't say that we are pleased by any means over the election returns. Neither can I say that my own knowledge of what is going to happen tonight is definitive at this stage of the game.

As I stand here I know that we have lost two Senate seats. We seem to have lost --

Sir?

Q Can you identify them?

MR. BURCH: We seem to have lost in the neighborhood of 15-plus House seats, plus some Governor's seats, but there are a number of races in which I have considerable interest about which I know nothing at this stage of the game.

I think it would be naive to suggest that this is a happy night for the Republicans, but I think it would be a little bit melancholy to suggest it is the worst night in history. It isn't the worst beating that has been taken. And I think that the Republican Party will survive this and will come back in two years in a very strong way.

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(OVER)

Q Would you please assess the effects of both Watergate and the Nixon pardon on the drubbing the Republicans took this evening?

MR. BURCH: I don't think anybody can scientifically weigh those things and say how much any one of these various issues play. Clearly we have an overriding issue of the economy this time, and I don't think it serves any particular purpose to sit around and worry about how much impact the Nixon period had, although quite clearly the Republicans have been taking a beating in the national mind now for about 15 months and that is bound to have affected the election.

I do think that if there is a mandate out of this election tonight, that mandate is not "Let's kick the Republicans around". I think the mandate is, "Let's see what we can do about the economy."

Now the voters seem to have translated that into the results that we have all witnessed, and I think that what the White House is interested in, what I hope the Congress is interested in, and what I am sure that the voters are interested in is some movement and some action starting when they come back in the lame duck session to deal with some of our economic problems. I think that is the real mandate out of this.

Q How do you assess the effects of President Ford's campaigning, especially since he was trying to tell the Country that the Democratic Party were big spenders?

MR. BURCH: I think that is one of the ironies of this election. I can't really analyze it in my own mind. When you read a poll which indicates that the number one issue is inflation, and when you break it down and most people agree that Government spending policies are at least contributory in large part to inflation, and then somehow the bottom line of the poll becomes "vote Democratic", that is one of the mysteries to me about this particular election year.

Obviously the people in large part chose Democratic candidates over Republicans and, be that as it may, those elected officials, whether they be Democratic, whether they be Republican, are going to have to work on the economic problems of this Country, and they are going to have to do it quickly, and they are going to have to cooperate with the President and vice-versa because that is what is expected.

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Q Do you think President Ford's campaigning had any effect on the election, Mr. Burch?

MR. BURCH: Yes, I do. I think it created more interest in the election than existed previously. He got some money together for some candidates who had no money and, contrary to the usual election year, this is the year when the Democrats had the money and the Republicans were very poor. I say contrary to the usual election year, contrary to the usual public perception of Republican candidates. The President was helpful to those candidates in raising some funds.

You do a box score on where the President went -- we won some, we lost some, we tied some. I can't give you any definitive factor as to how his campaigning --

Q The preliminary figures show that he campaigned for a lot of losers, a lot more losers than winners tonight.

MR. BURCH: I think there are a number of answers to that, and I don't know whether we need to belabor it. One of the things is that President Ford is the kind of a man who keeps commitments. He keeps commitments regardless of whether or not the person may be in some serious jeopardy when he goes into a State. He said he would go, he went.

Q Dean, you were telling us earlier that he was campaigning only where it was felt that the Republican had at least a chance. If that is true, if what you were telling us before was true, he campaigned where at least the Republicans had at least a chance, and in most cases it doesn't seem to have made much of a difference.

MR. BURCH: I don't know that you can say most cases. You go through the places we have been, he won some, he lost some. The two notable -- I suppose the most notable example is in Kansas for Bob Dole, the last campaign stop that we had was in Wichita. I am not here to tell you that is what changed that election around, but I certainly think it is something that has to be considered.

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Q You have in these cases, let's say, a couple of victories, at least what we see so far, a couple of victories perhaps in the Senate and gubernatorial races and that is it. How much of this can we read as a referendum on President Ford and his economic policies?

MR. BURCH: I think you can read as much as you care to read. That is your business. That is your racket.

Q How much would you read into it?

MR. BURCH: I wouldn't read a great deal into it, very candidly.

Q You said you considered this a mandate on the economy. Would you consider it a mandate for the President to scrap big parts of his economic program, particularly the surtax, which was obviously not well-received?

MR. BURCH: I don't know whether the surtax was well-received other than in the polls. I saw the same polling figures you saw on the networks, I presume. I have also seen others.

The President's economic program has not been tried. The President's economic program has not got off square one in the Congress. I think the people, no matter whether they elect Democrats or Republicans, want that program or a better program enacted.

Q Do you believe its chances of getting off square one are enhanced by this election or made less viable by this election?

MR. BURCH: Obviously when you get a one-sided, or a lopsided majority in the Congress, the Congress is going to have to play a very dominant part in the policy-making in this country -- the Democratic leadership -- because they have such strong numbers. But the fact is that I think the President is going to cooperate with the Congress and, hopefully, the Congress will cooperate with him so that we will all benefit.

Q Mr. Burch, obviously the Democrats are going to win a considerable majority in the new Congress --

MR. BURCH: They had a considerable majority before.

Q I mean a considerably wider margin than they had before. Does the President consider this a Congress that he can work with and will he be contemplating changes in his policies in order to cooperate with this Congress?

MR. BURCH: Well, the President certainly thinks that he can and will and must work with this Congress. And I honestly don't feel that this election was a referendum on his economic program, which has never been tested, which has never been even seriously debated in the Congress.

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He gave a speech, he presented a program, no action was taken on it. I think the decisions on that will be made when they come back for the lame duck session and thereafter.

Q Excuse me, Dean, I don't think the question was answered. The question was: As a result of what seems to be a landslide Democratic victory, do you think the President will change his positions? Do you think the President will make any changes in his programs, in his policies to accommodate himself to what the election said?

MR. BURCH: Well, I don't know that the -- I personally don't know what the election said as far as that economic package is concerned. That economic package, I think, is still somewhat of an unknown quantity.

The President clearly will operate with the understanding that he is dealing with a lopsided Democratic majority in both houses of the Congress and will act accordingly. He will carry out his duties and he will certainly hope that the Democratic leadership carries out theirs.

Q Mr. Burch, can you tell us what this bodes for the Republican party now in terms of the party's future and especially toward 1976?

MR. BURCH: You have only got -- at least so far as I know -- you have only one historical analogy and that is probably in the election of 1946 where you had a new President who had not stood for election himself, who took a terrible beating in an off-year election.

If you remember, in 1946 President Truman lost 12 senators and 55 members of the House and yet two years later that same President won the Presidency and increased his numbers in both the Senate and the House. So I think that is the only modern-day, historical analogy that I can cite to you.

Q Can you tell us how President Ford feels about what has been happening tonight? Have you talked to him at all?

MR. BURCH: Yes, I have talked to him.

Q Have you any comments at all that you can relate?

MR. BURCH: I think President Ford is terribly unhappy about his friends, those people that he admired in the House and Senate that have been defeated. He certainly does not despair of the future of the Republican Party nor of his ability to govern this country, nor to deal with the Congress, nor to meet the problems of the economy, foreign policy, and the rest of the problems that we face.

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Q Why not?

Q Ron, will there be a statement from the President?

MR. NESSEN: We expect to have a statement from the President sometime soon.

Q When?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the exact time.

Q I would like to ask a question, if I could.

You said the President made a speech about an economic program which wasn't tested. I seem to remember 30 or 40 speeches talking about the need for a representative Republican support in Congress, talking about "get the rascals out, get the spenders out, get the inflationary people out, preserve the peace," if you will.

Now this program obviously was tested at the local level.

MR. BURCH: Somehow I just don't happen to agree with your hypothesis.

Q Does this lend any encouragement, do you think, or should it lend any encouragement to Ronald Reagan or any other Republican who might want to challenge President Ford for the nomination in 1976?

MR. BURCH: I don't know. I suppose you could bat that around all night, whether anybody would get any encouragement from a situation like this. I don't see why it should. I think we have been in perhaps the most unique political position in the history of this Country.

For 14 or 15 months the Republican Party has been absolutely slammed because of the Watergate scandal. I think that the polsters, those who study this thing closely, have detected for some time a strong feeling of uneasiness, of malaise among the voters, and the Republican Party in part took it on the chin because of that.

I don't think that that is any omen for the future. I don't think that it has any long-term significance. I think the only way we can decide all these hypotheticals is to wait until 1976.

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Q If you had it to do over again, would you change the President's campaign strategy?

MR. BURCH: No, I don't think so. The President is the President of the United States. He is also the leader of the Republican Party, and he is a human being. He campaigned for members of his Party. He campaigned for friends. He campaigned the best way he could under the circumstances.

Q Mr. Burch, the President campaigned through 20 States saying, in effect, that the Democrats favored spending much more than Republicans. The voters seem to be saying that they do too. Would you read it that way?

MR. BURCH: I don't read it that way. I don't think anybody reads it that the voters are asking for a lot of Federal spending and unbalanced budgets. I just don't think that is in the cards.

Q Did the election come out as you expected it, or as the President expected it?

MR. BURCH: I don't know how the election came out, first of all. It is only 11:30.

Q Is it coming out as he expected it?

MR. BURCH: I don't know what is happening in California. I don't know what is happening in Oregon. I don't know what is happening in a lot of places.

Q Of the races that have been counted so far, has he been surprised at the outcome?

MR. BURCH: I don't suppose you could say he is surprised. You know we had pretty good knowledge of what was going on in these various races, the two Senate seats. We knew there were difficulties there, and we knew there were some House Members. I think he was not surprised. He was not pleased certainly.

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Q Dean, you said the President now faces a lopsided majority in both houses. I want to get back to something you said and find out if I can what you mean by it. You said the President now faces lopsided majorities in both houses, and the President will act accordingly. What do you mean by that? What specifically do you expect the President to do in this situation?

MR. BURCH: I don't mean anything sinister by it. I don't mean anything that would really occupy more than one sentence. I simply think the President is well aware of the fact that he will have a Democratic majority in the House and a Democratic majority in the Senate, and that if he expects to get along with the Congress, and they expect to get along with him, both sides have to give a little. I don't mean anything more than that.

Q Can you tell us in direct, simple language --

MR. HUSHEN: Let John have a question. He has been trying to get one in.

Q You said the economy was an overriding issue. You were asked a question about the Nixon pardon and Watergate. You said the economy was an overriding issue. Later on you said we have a unique situation because of Watergate and the feeling of malaise. What is the overriding concern here?

MR. BURCH: I think Watergate in the past 14 or 15 months has created a situation which is a subliminal problem. I don't know that it is palpable any more. That was the response to the question, how do you assess this?

I don't know that it can be assessed. I think everybody who has done any studying at all in this campaign realizes that the dominant issue, at least as stated by the people, is the economy. Watergate is probably a subliminal issue, and I don't know how you analyze it. But the palpable issue is the economy.

MR. HUSHEN: Bob, you may have the last question.

Q Wait a while, Jack, before I go ahead. When you say let Bob have the last question, I think it is up to the senior wire service correspondent to say what the last question shall be. So I am not going to ask a question with the understanding that it is the last question.

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MR. NESSEN: I don't think we should subject Mr. Burch to an argument among reporters about who has the last question.

Q It is not an argument among reporters, it is an argument between the White House Deputy Press Secretary and the reporters.

MR. NESSEN: Thank you very much, Dean.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

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(11:30 P.M. EST)