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Dallas Trip Kennedy's Idea

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The chief reason for Kennedy family bitterness against L.B.J. immediately after the assassination was the belief that it was the Vice President who had persuaded John F. Kennedy to go to Texas.

In the absence of Johnson's persuasiveness, President Kennedy never would have gone to the dangerous anti-Kennedy city of Dallas and would be alive today—or so the Kennedy family believes. This has contributed to the enmity between the two most powerful political families in America and may influence the next election for President.

However, we have done some careful research regarding the reasons why President Kennedy went to Texas and find that the facts are exactly the opposite. It was President Kennedy himself, not the Vice President, who initiated the trip.

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In August, 1961, eight months after President Kennedy was inaugurated, he approached Speaker Sam Rayburn regarding a trip to Texas and asked him to handle the preparations. Rayburn said he would be glad to do so, but the time was not ripe. He suggested President Kennedy wait until after the 1962 Congressional and gubernatorial elections.

Rayburn died on Nov. 16, 1961. The following August, President Kennedy conferred with another Texas congressman, the late Albert Thomas of Houston, who had helped make that city an important capital for the space program.

Thomas suggested a President fund-raising dinner in Houston could raise a lot of money for the Democratic Party. At that time Dick McGuire, chief Democratic money-raiser, had been pressing President Kennedy because no funds had been collected in Texas since 1960.

After talking to Thomas, President Kennedy phoned Vice President Johnson, who advised him to check with John Connally, President Kennedy's secretary of the Navy, then running for governor of Texas.

Connally was then embroiled in a tough primary election with Sen. Ralph Yarborough, a liberal Democrat whom he managed to defeat in the final run-off by only 20,000 votes. During the campaign, Connally had said he was opposed to most of

President Kennedy's program while Yarborough supported Mr. Kennedy.

After Connally's victory in November, 1962, Dick McGuire telephoned Connally about the proposed Kennedy trip and the fund-raising dinner. Connally replied that the time was still not ripe. He wanted to pay off his own debt, which amounted to nearly \$1,500,000—the biggest in Texas politics — and he didn't want money drained off to the Democratic National Committee.

Following Gov.-elect Connally's negative response, President Kennedy checked with Vice President Johnson about the trip. Mr. Johnson agreed with Connally, urged delay.

Six months later, in June, 1963, President Kennedy told both Vice President Johnson and Gov. Connally that he wanted to go to Texas.

Connally didn't give all the reasons to President Kennedy, but he felt the Kennedy visit would not help him politically at all.

Later in the summer, while Connally was visiting in Washington, President Kennedy proposed that the Texas fund-raising dinner be held Aug. 27, Lyndon Johnson's birthday. Connally said no, it was too close to Labor Day.

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However, he agreed that the dinner should be held in November. He was still far from enthusiastic since he was still raising money to pay off his own 1962 campaign debt. However, inasmuch as President Kennedy had appointed Connally secretary of the navy, Connally owed him some support and finally agreed on the November date. Significantly, the President admonished Connally: "Don't tell Lyndon. He'll get his nose out of joint if I go down against his advice."

Vice President Johnson didn't learn about the dinner until September.

On Oct. 20, one day after the biggest dinner in Texas history for Sen. Yarborough, the White House officially confirmed the fact that Kennedy was going to Texas on Nov. 21-22.

It was only at this point that Vice President Johnson, who had cautioned against the Texas trip in the first place, got official confirmation. He then telephoned several Texas leaders to help assure that the dinner would be a success.

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