

# Outspoken Businessman

John Thomas Connor

WHEN the prestigious Business Council, a group of the nation's top industrialists, invited John Thomas Connor to address its spring meeting yesterday about the situation in Southeast Asia, its members probably could not have anticipated the intensity of his remarks. But by the time that the chairman of Allied Chemical Corporation and former Secretary of Commerce ended his talk in Hot Springs, Va., there was no doubt about his opposition to the movement of American troops into Cambodia and his belief that the Vietnam disengagement should be quickened.

The frankness of his attack on current American policy, in a speech to the leaders of the business establishment, came as no surprise to the close friends of the 55-year-old executive. For despite his basic shyness and quiet demeanor, he has usually spoken and acted decisively on matters that he believes to be important.

For example, when President Johnson appointed him Secretary of Commerce in 1965, Mr. Connor accepted with the understanding that he would have a decisive role in formulating national economic policy. When he realized that his influence in this field was limited—"He was conned by the master conner of them all," said one former Commerce Department aide—he resigned.

It was known in Government circles that Mr. Connor had reservations about the nation's financial capacity and willingness both to fight the Vietnam War and to produce the Great Society. "I don't know if I helped the Government much," he said following his return to private life in 1967, "but the Government surely taught me a lesson."

## Proud Administrator

Upon joining Allied Chemical as president that year, the Syracuse native was given the job of turning the corporation around from a slow-moving giant into a more aggressive and profitable competitor in the fast-changing chemical industry. While that job still remains to be completed, Mr. Connor—he has since been promoted to chairman and chief execu-



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associate. "That's one of the things that upset him most about L.B.J. He thought that President Johnson was great at exercising his will on other people but was not very good on using people properly."

Mr. Connor is a lifelong Democrat. He is the father of the executive director of the State Democratic Committee in New Jersey, where the whole family lives. In addition to 28-year-old John T. Jr., he and Mrs. Connor—the former Mary O'Boyle of Milwaukee—have two other children: Geoffrey M., a 23-year-old lieutenant (jg.) in the Navy, and Lisa F., a 19-year-old sophomore at Smith College.

After graduating from Syracuse University in 1936, Mr. Connor had thoughts of becoming a golf professional. He went on to graduate from the Harvard Law School three years later and has continued his interest in golf; at one time, had a three handicap.

Mr. Connor spent three years at the Wall Street law firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore and a year as a World War II air combat intelligence officer in the Pacific. As a young man, he also learned the Washington ropes by working with Dr. Vannevar Bush at the Office of Scientific Research and Development and with Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal.

Between 1947 and 1965, Mr. Connor was associated with Merck & Co., Inc. In 1955, he told Dr. Bush, who was then the Merck chairman, "I should be the new president." He was given the job and spent 10 years in the president's chair, from which he gained fame and fortune.

tive officer—pulled the company out of a number of unfruitful ventures, stopped the overextension of resources and finances, and melded many divisional operations into a single corporate entity.

"He prides himself as an administrator," observed an