

# Texas 'swashbuckler' John Connally dies

By Laura Goldberg  
USA TODAY

John Connally, the Texas governor wounded when President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, was remembered Tuesday as a legendary, colorful and influential player in national politics.

He died in a Houston hospital of complications from pulmonary fibrosis. He was first hospitalized May 17.

Connally, 76, switched from Democrat to Republican in 1973 — after the death of political mentor Lyndon Johnson — leading some Democrats to accuse him of betrayal.

Former U.S. House speaker Jim Wright, a Democrat, said Connally symbolized the best of Texas: "Gallant, self-confident and decisive, daring, almost swashbuckling."

"John Connally dominated an entire era of Texas political



**IN DALLAS, 1963:** Texas Gov. John Connally was seriously wounded when President Kennedy was assassinated.

leadership in a way done by no other in modern times save Lyndon Johnson."

He recalled when President Richard Nixon asked Connally

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to be Treasury secretary. "Connally told Nixon he would not accept an appointment unless first Nixon did something for (fellow Texan

George) Bush," Wright said.

Connally was Treasury secretary from 1971-1972. Bush became the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Bush Tuesday called Connally "one of the great governors of Texas."

Connally became widely known when he was seriously injured in Kennedy's limousine in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Reflecting 20 years later on the assassination, Connally said: "It made you realize in a fleeting second you could be gone, so you really don't have any time to waste, to fritter away on petty things."

Connally served as Texas governor three times from 1963 to 1969. He also made three runs for the presidency.

"At every major milestone of contemporary Texas, John Connally was there, standing tall, leading, making a difference, making history," Sen.

Phil Gramm, R-Texas, said.

In 1974, there were charges he took a \$10,000 bribe from milk industry executives while serving as Treasury secretary.

He was acquitted. Detractors continued to say he was guilty of influence-peddling.

Known for huge business deals, Connally declared bankruptcy in 1987 when the Texas economy went bust as oil and real estate prices slumped. He auctioned his possessions to help pay creditors.

More recently, he accompanied Coastal Corp. Chairman Oscar Wyatt on a December 1990 trip to Baghdad to seek the release of hostages from Saddam Hussein. They returned with 19 hostages.

"I'll miss his phone calls; I'll miss his extraordinary good humor," said Texas Gov. Ann Richards, a Democrat. "I'll miss his optimism and his encouragement."