

Former Texas governor Connally dies

Associated Press

HOUSTON — John Connally, a three-time Texas governor and former Cabinet member who was wounded in the gunfire that killed President Kennedy, died Tuesday of pulmonary fibrosis. He was 76.

Connally and his close friend and political partner, the late President Lyndon B. Johnson, were dominant forces in Texas politics for decades until the early 1970s.

Connally was governor from 1963 to 1968. In 1961 he served for a few months as Kennedy's secretary of the Navy, but left to run for governor. He was treasury secretary for President Nixon from 1971 to 1972.

Connally was riding in the car with Kennedy when the president was assassinated in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. He was hit too and the bullet passed through his body, leaving him with scars on his back, chest, wrist and thigh.

Later, he would recall drifting in and out of consciousness for four days. He watched on television — "really the first sustained consciousness I had" — as Kennedy's body was carried to Arlington National Cemetery.

Reflecting 20 years after 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 or frivolities."

In Washington, President Clinton said Connally dedicated his life to his country and "to the principles in which he so passionately believed."

"He will be remembered fondly by his state and his country for the work that he did and the person that he was," Clinton said in a statement.

"I lost a real good friend," Gov. Ann Richards said. "I'll miss his phone calls. I'll miss his extraordinary good humor. I'll miss his optimism and his encouragement."

She ordered flags at state buildings flown at half-staff beginning today and lasting through Connally's funeral, which was scheduled for Thursday in Austin. His body was to lie in state in the Texas House chambers before the funer-

al.

After Johnson's death in 1973, Connally switched from the Democratic to the Republican Party, and his popularity waned.

Connally's 1974 indictment by a Watergate grand jury further eroded his political power, though he was acquitted of charges that he accepted a \$10,000 bribe from milk producers to persuade Nixon to raise price supports.

Connally ran for president in 1980, but dropped out in March after Ronald Reagan trounced him in the South Carolina Republican primary. After spending \$12.5 million he garnered only one pledged delegate.

The 6-foot-2 Texan hailed Reagan as "the champ," and was the first ex-presidential candidate to campaign for him.

President Reagan said of Connally on Tuesday: "Leaders from both parties have always been able to turn to him for his sensible views and sound advice."

Former President George Bush called him "one of the great governors of Texas."

After his 1980 loss, Connally

worked in the Houston and Washington offices of the law firm of Vinson & Elkins. He reportedly rejected Reagan's offer to become secretary of energy and was offended at not being offered secretary of state or defense.

Connally filed for bankruptcy in 1987, listing debts of \$93.3 million, mostly from oil and real estate deals that collapsed with the Texas economy in the 1980s, and assets of \$13 million. The following year, he and his wife, Nellie, auctioned most of their belongings to pay their debts.

After his bankruptcy, Connally

seemed to rebound in the social and political scene.

In 1990, he and Houston oilman Oscar S. Wyatt negotiated the release of 21 hostages held during the Persian Gulf crisis by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

In May, Connally announced he was helping steer a \$75 million venture to build a parimutuel horse race track outside Houston.

Connally married Idanell "Nellie" Brill of Austin in 1940, and a year later received his law degree from the University of Texas. Best man at his wedding was U.S. Rep. J.J. "Jake" Pickle, D-Austin.