



Rowland Evans and Robert Novak



The Connally Syndrome

MIAMI BEACH—The bizarre choice of the politically discredited Mario Procaccino to head John B. Connally's Democrats for Nixon in New York explains why party leaders attending the Republican national convention are so much less enthusiastic than President Nixon over the burgeoning Connally operation.

Connally's campaign to mobilize anti-McGovern Democrats behind Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign has run into so much Republican opposition that Clark MacGregor, the President's campaign manager, has issued confidential orders barring the Connally operation from states where Republican leaders do not want him.

Thus, in endless political discussions filling time here, there is disenchantment especially strong in the South—about conservative Democrat Connally. With Mr. Nixon holding a staggering lead, these party leaders say, Connally is damaging the Republican Party in their states.

The Procaccino case is symbolic. With Texan Connally lacking even rudimentary knowledge of New York

politics, he knew nothing about Procaccino, who ran an inept campaign for mayor of New York in 1969. So Connally accepted without question a recommendation to make Procaccino vice chairman of his New York operation (with Connally himself as chairman). When they learned this, Mr. Nixon's New York political operatives bluntly informed Connally that Procaccino was a "laughing stock" without influence or organization. The solution: Connally quickly named half a dozen other "vice chairmen," diminishing Procaccino's visibility.

CONNALLY'S worst problems are in the South, where some Republican leaders bitterly complain his Democrats for Nixon undermine their party-building efforts.

With Connally remaining a Democrat, and backing the Texas Democratic ticket except for Mr. Nixon, Southern party leaders make no secret here that they see his Democrats for Nixon as an easy out for prominent Southerners to avoid the hard political choice of turning Republican.

A case in point is Virginia, where Democratic Sen. William Spong, fearful that Sen. George McGovern may defeat his re-election bid, has disassociated himself from McGovern's presidential campaign. With a full-blown Connally operation in Virginia, other moderate Democrats such as Attorney General Andrew Miller might hang their hats on the Democrats for Nixon pole and ride out a Nixon landslide.

"We don't want to let the Andy Millers off the hook," one Virginia Republican leader here told us, "and that's what Connally would do." The upshot: An announcement that Sidney Kellam, long-time conservative Democratic leader in Virginia Beach, would be Democrats for Nixon vice chairman was quietly reversed. Connally will avoid the Old Dominion.

REPUBLICAN leaders in Tennessee also have locked the door on Connally, sending this ultimatum to MacGregor: If John Connally sets foot in Tennessee, the result will be a psychological disaster for the Republican organization, undefeated statewide since 1964.

Connally has suffered other reverses. He quietly offered a campaign job to Charles Snider, Gov. George Wallace's aborted 1972 presidential campaign manager. Snider was willing but asked Wallace's permission. Wallace said no.

For Connally, these setbacks could damage what White House aides are convinced is his long-range course: A change in party registration, a high post in a second Nixon administration (probably secretary of state) and a run for the 1976 Republican presidential nomination.

Connally confronts not only organizational obstacles in his pro-Nixon campaign but also growing hostility from ambitious Republicans beginning to regard him as a threat to their own ascent. In Texas, Sen. John Tower has fought partisan battles against Connally for a decade and would scarcely welcome him as Mr. Republican in Texas. Even worse, with Connally backing Tower's Democratic opponent for the Senate (Barefoot Sanders), Tower's intimate fear Connally's ticket-splitting campaign in Texas.