

10/15/73  
Tom

## REPUBLICANS

### Big John on the Road

"Every now and then, you oldtimers of the party ought to listen to us young fellows just a little," drawled the speaker at the \$50-a-plate Republican fundraising bash in Kansas City, Kans. "And I happen to be about the newest fellow there is in this party." The mostly prosperous, middle-aged G.O.P. faithful in the audience were hardly the sort who normally take well to lecturings from their juniors, but they were very interested in hearing this one. The "youngest Republican," as he cheerfully proclaims himself, was Big John Connally—five months young as a registered member of the G.O.P., but about as politically junior as Boss Tweed in his heyday. The audience loved it.

Connally is in the early phase of a speechmaking blitz that by mid-December is to take him, in at least 40 separate appearances, to every section of the nation. Like his talk in Kansas City, about half are scheduled for strictly Republican audiences—the middle-ranking committee members and fund raisers who feel that they have a right to a firsthand look at the party's newest star and who can be very helpful at a nominating convention if they like him. "I'm going to pace myself a little better next year," Connally claims. "I did get a little too heavily committed this fall. But I enjoy it."

**Short Visits.** Connally's getting-to-know-you campaign could hardly be better timed. With Vice President Spiro Agnew's political future suddenly in deep trouble, the party is without a front runner for its 1976 nomination. Though Connally's staff insists that his key speaking engagements were set before Agnew's problems became known and that he is thus not using the Vice President's political wounds to his own advantage, Connally is clearly not about to shrink from the possibility of taking over the party's powerful conservative wing.

His primary message is a blend of sophisticated logic about the limits of U.S. resources and rather simplistic answers to the resulting problems. "We've got some rough days ahead of us," says Connally. "We don't have all the oil we need, we don't have all the energy we need. We've got to rely on Chile and Zambia and Saudi Arabia and Canada, and they're going to set the price." How to cope? "We're going to have to be more thrifty in our use of things. Let's just recognize the problem and buckle down and get at it."

The youngest Republican says that he has never discussed with President Nixon the possibility of succeeding Agnew if the office of vice president should become vacant. However, he has strongly urged the President not to choose a weak "caretaker" No. 2 under any circumstances. Coming from the party's leading non-wallflower, that hardly

sounded like a Shermansque bowing out.

As for the other subject that requires delicate handling by Republicans these days, Watergate, Connally is much more direct. "Let's talk about Watergate," he thundered in Kansas City. "Before you put on your mourning clothes, let me ask for a show of hands in this hall from anyone who had any part in it." Getting across his point that the party should not take the blame for the acts of a "few individuals," Connally then indulged a frequent penchant for overstatement by going on to compare any Watergate-caused "class indictment" against Republicans to "religious indictments and racial indictments."

His rambling, overlong style has left many of Big John's audiences a bit

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CONNALLY MINGLING AT TEXAS APPEARANCE  
*The No. 1 non-wallflower.*

heavy-lidded by the end of the evening, but by and large, Republicans seem enthusiastic about their newest convert. "The people I talked to before the meeting were skeptical because he's a short-term Republican," said Architect Richard Peters of Lawrence, Kans. "But they're damned glad now that he's a Republican."

Pressing the flesh with small businessmen and middle-level party workers does not come easily to the high-powered Connally. He usually arranges to keep his visits short, even if that requires chartering a jet back to Houston following a late-evening speech. Sometimes, though, there is just no way. Last week after an appearance in Grand Rapids, Connally plaintively asked an aide: "We've definitely got to stay here tonight, haven't we?" The answer was yes.