

GOP Welcomes Connally;

By Peter Milius

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Republicans — including prospective rivals for the 1976 presidential nomination — welcomed former Democrat John B. Connally to their ranks yesterday, but Democrats made light of the announcement.

One theme of the Republican reaction was that Connally had come over to the party when it sorely needed help as a result of Watergate.

"He can be of enormous help to our party during this time of adversity," said Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kans.), national chairman last year of the GOP and a candidate for reelection to the Senate next year.

"This is the first time I ever heard of a Secretary of the Navy jumping on a sink-



REP. THOMAS P. O'NEILL
... all aboard

ing ship," responded House Majority Leader Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.).

Connally was Secretary of the Navy in the Kennedy administration.

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said President Nixon "is pleased to have a man of his (Connally's) accomplishments as a member of the Republican Party."

Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, who is thought likely to be, along with Connally, a contender for the GOP presidential nomination in 1976, said he welcomed Connally to the party with "great pleasure."

Calling Connally "a talented and personable man, an effective and articulate spokesman for traditional American values," Agnew said the change of party by the former governor and Treasury Secretary "demonstrates that the Re-

publican Party is the appropriate political vehicle for most Americans, the one that best accommodates their hopes and aspirations."

"I know," Agnew concluded, in a carefully phrased reminder that Connally is a latecomer to the GOP; "that all Republicans will join me in welcoming Mr. Connally aboard."

Democrats, by contrast, professed to be either slightly bored or amused by Connally's conversion.

"The news was not unexpected nor in my opinion does it represent any great change," said Democratic National Committee Chairman Robert S. Strauss, another Texan. He noted that Connally served in both President Nixon's Cabinet

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and his campaign for reelection.

Texas Lt. Gov. William P. Hobby, a Democrat, made a joke of Connally's action.

"I understand how Bob Strauss and George Bush (the Republican National Committee's chairman) could make the trade," said Hobby. "The Democratic Party got John Lindsay, and the Republicans today get John Connally. Surely we get next year's first-round draft choice and a senator to be named at a later date." New York City Mayor John V. Lindsay made the switch from Republican to Democrat in 1971.

Some Republicans suggested that Connally's action might presage a wider exodus from the Democratic Party, both in and outside of Texas,

Dole's successor as the GOP's national chairman, George Bush, also a Texan, said that "this move today confirms that the new Republican majority we have been talking about in this country is happening . . . I predict many, many more will follow him (Connally) into the ranks of the GOP."

Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.), another possible seeker after the party's 1976 nomination, called Connally's decision "gratifying" and "in keeping with President Nixon's stated wish to make the Republican Party the 'party of the open door.'"

Sen. John G. Tower (R-

Tex.) said "the timing of his (Connally's) announcement demonstrates the sincerity of his commitment," and added the hope that "all like-minded Democrats will follow his example" in what Tower called "the growing trend toward realistic political realignment" in the country.

On the other hand, former Sen. Ralph W. Yarborough of Texas, a Democrat and an old enemy of Connally, said, "I don't think he's switched. This is just a public confession that that's where he's been in spirit all these years."

"I think it much better for the Democratic Party to

have an open opponent in the Republican Party than to have a Trojan horse inside the Democratic Party," Yarborough went on.

From elsewhere in the GOP, meanwhile, came an invitation to Connally, and a challenge:

"If Mr. Connally has political ambitions," said Rep. Robert H. Michel (R-Ill.), chairman of the Republican Congressional Committee, "I suggest that the 1974 congressional elections provide him with a solid testing ground. I extend an invitation to him to join with us in the 1974 campaign to elect a Republican Congress."