

That Picnic in Texas

By Vera Glaser and Malvina Stephenson

Washington

REPUBLICAN Richard Nixon snuggled under Democrat John Connally's bedcovers last week and dreamed of 26 sugarplums — Texas' electoral votes.

The Secretary of the Treasury and his wife, Nellie, had given up their personal suite to the President and First Lady Pat. The vast yellow wicker-filled bedroom, flanked by a pair of dressing rooms and baths, boasts a spectacular view of grassy acres dotted with red cattle and live oaks.

Even former President Johnson never occupied those intimate digs on his frequent visits to Connally's Picoso (Little Pepper) Ranch near San Antonio.

Back in Washington, the Connallys, exuding charm, profess to be unaware of the

political impact of their bash for the Nixons.

Mrs. Connally described the 225 rich Democrats and Republicans who came for steak, champagne, and an approving closeup of the President and Pat, as "just a good bunch of folks."

How did the Connallys feel when Nixon touted John as "capable of holding any job in the United States?"

"Flattered" and "thrilled" were her careful nonpolitical words.

Although most establishment Democrats and Republicans are keeping cautiously mum, the Connally party drew flak from Texas liberals.

State AFL-CIO President Roy R. Evans tagged Connally "The Secretary of Treachery" and "Nixon's oil slick."

"He's a Republican at heart," Evans said. "He likes deep rugs and rich people. He wants to be on the ticket this year and to be the GOP presidential nominee in 1976. The oil money wants him there, too."

Intentionally or not, the whingding was scheduled shortly before the Texas primary, held Saturday. The Democratic campaigns for state races were sensitive for former Texas Governor Connally.

His good friend, Democrat Ben Barnes, the current Texas lieutenant governor, lost the gubernatorial nomination, running third. His own brother, State Senator Wayne Connally, finished second in the race for lieutenant governor, and will



JOHN CONNALLY
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MRS. CONNALLY
. . . from the liberals

face a runoff with a political unknown, Bill Hobby of Houston.

Democratic Representative Wright Patman, dean of the Texas delegation, called the Connally party "a great disappointment to many Texas Democrats."

Former Senator Ralph Yarborough, a Democrat, branded Connally "The Mr. Moneybags of the GOP" and said none of the guests had contributed to Yarborough campaigns.

Another sour note emanated from GOP Vice Chairwoman Mrs. Malcolm Milburn of Austin, who initially objected to the possibility of Nixon being photographed with Democratic candidates. Connally solved that by not inviting any candidates or office-holders.

After the party, Mrs. Milburn cooled down. She admitted Connally and his rich friends could "make the difference" in November for Nixon in Texas.

By pulling in fat cats of both parties to honor Nixon, Connally "subtly and with style pointed their allegiance in a new direction." Texas correspondent Margaret Mayer said. Four years ago Connally's support of LBJ and Hubert Humphrey helped defeat Nixon in Texas.

At least one former Democratic official, George Christian, reached in Austin, said he'd find it tough not to work for Connally, should he become Nixon's running mate this year.

Christian was a top Connally aide in the Texas State House, then became LBJ's news secretary, is now a political consultant for Democrats, and was invited to the ranch party.

Pretty Mrs. Connally spent ten exhausting days preparing for the Nixon visit. Shunning caterers, she worked with the hired help, washing lettuce, shucking corn and tramping the fields to collect a bouquet of Texas wildflowers for Pat Nixon.

The blooms were past their prime in that area, but Nellie found a few bluebonnets, Indian pinks, firewheels and tiny white and yellow daisies. She arranged them in an antique glass basket, put them in the "cooling room," then — in the flurry of the presidential arrival — forgot to present them to the First Lady.

"It was exciting for me," Mrs. Connally said. "I was kind of nervous. I wanted everything to be right in the house for Mrs. Nixon, who is gracious, fastidious, and gentle. I think everyone had a good time."



RALPH YARBOROUGH
A sour note